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# Black Men's Responsible Fatherhood Narratives: Fatherhood, Responsibility, Race, and Gender

Shane Chaplin

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BLACK MEN'S RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD NARRATIVES: FATHERHOOD,  
RESPONSIBILITY, RACE, AND GENDER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology

By

Shane S. Chaplin

August 2012

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Shane S. Chaplin

2012

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By

Shane S. Chaplin

Approved May 24<sup>th</sup> 2012

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## ABSTRACT

# BLACK MEN'S RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD NARRATIVES: FATHERHOOD, RESPONSIBILITY, RACE, AND GENDER

By

Shane S. Chaplin

August 2012

Dissertation supervised by Constance Fischer, PhD

Over the last few decades increasing rates of single mother households in the United States have triggered a national alarm over the effects of father absence on society. Father absence has been linked specifically to many of the problems plaguing black communities in the United States (e.g. poverty, low educational attainment, etc.) and as a result community and political leaders alike have consistently promoted responsible fatherhood practices as a way to address them. Although responsible fatherhood has received, in this context, a considerable amount of social attention, this attention has come intertwined with considerable political and moral rhetoric at all levels, making an idea invested with a wide variety of often-conflicting meanings and interests.

Given the paucity of academic studies giving voice to black fathers at the metaphoric “front line” of the national responsible fatherhood effort, this author used a

variation of The Listening Guide (Gilligan 2003) to capture the narratives of four black fathers volunteering in a local responsible fatherhood program. Critical Social Representations Theory was used to frame the interaction between participants and the social contexts within which they are embedded, paying particular attention to participants' positioning in regard to social representations of race and gender. The widely different understandings of fatherhood present within the results point to fatherhood as a highly dynamic concept. Responsibility, on the other hand, was understood primarily as father presence, a middle class ideal that I argue is problematic given the realities of poor black fathers. Finally, all fathers tended to resist ideas of *race* as essence, even if in regard to *gender* all fathers adopted hegemonic positions endorsing views of gender difference as essential and as grounded in biology. Overall, results reveal complex portrayals of black fathers and their lives in communities where race, poverty, incarceration, drugs, violence, or family court all pose additional challenges to responsible fatherhood.

## DEDICATION

To my son Spencer, who posed the initial question.  
To my son Sydney, who provided the final urgency.  
And to my wife Shannon, who lived through all its high and lows with me  
and never stopped believing. This is for you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

One of the fathers interviewed in this dissertation stated that “it takes a village” to raise a child. Writing a dissertation is no different. A work such as this carries only one authorial signature, but bears the invisible mark of many. Many like my parents, who made this work possible through their relentless support and encouragement. Beyond this dissertation, there is a trace of their love in everything I have achieved in my life. Many like brother Melvin (where do I start?); this study would not exist without his kindness and support. Many like the fathers that participated in this study, who opened their hearts and souls to me and taught me more about life with their stories than I ever thought possible. Many like my mother-in-law, Linda Foster, or my friend, Amy Gleue, both of whom took care of my children during extended periods of time, often despite carrying tremendous burdens themselves as mothers, burdens this dissertation pales to in comparison. Many like Sarah Ritter or Andrea Brailey, who in taking care of my youngest child at different key moments of this work also helped move it forward in ways they will probably never fully appreciate. Many like Bob Steck, an unlikely friend over the last two years, the embodiment of all that is good about the world, who has given me and my family more over the time we have known him than many do over a lifetime of friendship. Many like Marilyn Henline, a repository of knowledge about anything and everything about the Psychology department, who has rescued me more than once from total catastrophe. Many like numerous friends and peers who provided words of encouragement at vital moments to help keep me going.

I am also profoundly grateful to my committee. To Dr. Fischer, my director, who provided extensive feedback and managed to be practical while also respecting my



overall vision. I have the incredible honor of being her last doctoral student: it will be a story I will tell and a badge I will wear with honor the rest of my academic career. To Dr. Hopson, a mentor, friend and role model over the last four years. Our conversations and his feedback over coffee, in class, at his home, over the phone all clarified this work, challenged my thinking and highlighted issues I would have never thought of without him. My admiration for him knows no bounds. To Dr. Gemignani, a friend who always treated me like a peer and not a student, and checked on me regularly over the last three years, never making me feel forgotten. His suggestions have undoubtedly improved this work, and will continue to do so as I move it into its next stages.

Above all, I am thankful to my wife and mother of my children, Shannon Foster. Before I began this process I had heard marriage and dissertations are like water and oil, they do not mix well. I can now say with certainty it depends on who you are married to. Thank you.

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## **Chapter I: Background and Introduction**

### **The Landscape: Fatherhood, Responsibility, Race, and Gender**

Over the last several decades U.S. Census demographic statistics have unveiled a number of revealing changing family-formation trends. Of these, the significant increase in single-parent homes since the 1970's has perhaps been the most salient and studied of all. Although both mother-headed and father-headed single-parent homes have grown since then, statistics on single parenthood are particularly salient in regards to mother-headed homes. The increase in mother-headed homes seems to indicate, amongst other things, a significant decrease in father daily presence and engagement within American families. This fatherhood trend, often referred to as one of "father absence," ignited in the 1990s a heated public and political debate surrounding fatherhood. This debate focused on the importance of fathers in families, their function and place within them, the causal factors behind the absence trend, as well as the necessity (or not) to reverse it for the benefit of children, families, and society. Although this trend showed up independent of racial categories, it has been particularly marked in the case of black fathers, for whom U.S. Census (2009) statistics show rates of father absence at least doubling that of any other racial group. This racial disparity split the national narrative on father absence, and created two different, parallel stories. On the one hand, what I call here the "race-neutral" and larger absent-fatherhood narrative is presented publicly as independent of race and attempts to center the debate on family values. In this narrative fatherlessness is theoretically conceptualized as complex and causally over-determined—with some social forces (e.g. feminism, divorce, the welfare state) highlighted more often than others—even if in practice fatherlessness is typically socially blamed on the individual father not



fulfilling his obligations to his family.

On the other hand, the subordinated, smaller parallel narrative on father absence – what I refer to here as the black absent-fatherhood narrative– made race an essential aspect of the story, and centered the debate primarily on the structural and cultural factors affecting specifically black fathers. Within this narrative the U.S. Census numbers on absent black fathers played into a number of themes and stereotypes regarding black families already present since the Jim Crow era. Amongst these is a picture where absent-fatherhood is a problem particularly within black families not so much because of larger structural and historical problems affecting black communities, but because of the essential, cultural, and/or will-related aspects of black fathers themselves who, by merely *being* black, are seen as more likely to be absent and irresponsible. Within this narrative then –and contrary to its larger version– the tendency to be absent as a father is socially represented as an intrinsic aspect of black masculinity and not other masculinities.

Influencing both absent-fatherhood narratives are some of the studies on life outcomes of children being raised within single-parent homes (see, for example, Carlson, 2006, Coley 1998, or DeBell 2008). These studies consistently report children raised in single-parent families to be at a disadvantage socially, educationally, economically, and in regards to health outcomes when compared to children being raised in intact families. Because the disadvantages of being raised within a single-parent home are similar to those of being born black in America (see Wise 2010), but *not* of simply being born in America regardless of racial background, these disadvantages have led to different conclusions and consequences within each of the absent-fatherhood narratives presented above. In the race-neutral narrative, absent fatherhood has been socially represented as a

problem for the children of the absent fathers who, regardless of race, are considered at a disadvantage in regard to those of families with two parents present. Absent fathers are therefore encouraged to be present and behave responsibly for the benefit of their children without –beyond larger debates on the family and society– necessarily attaching any other larger social consequence to their behavior. Although within this narrative responsible fatherhood is offered as a solution to most, if not all, social problems affecting U.S. communities, the causal relationship between present social problems and the irresponsible behavior of absent fathers is not exploited as clearly or as often in theory or practice.

In the black absent fatherhood narrative, however, irresponsible fatherhood practices acquire a different, concrete and all-encompassing social importance. Within this narrative absent fatherhood is made to speak not only to the disadvantages of children of absent fathers, but very specifically to the larger social, educational, economic and health problems present in black communities. The large percentage of reported absent fathers within black communities has often served to both confirm and support negative stereotypes of the black father as deficient in either essence, culture, or will, and to trace a direct causal line from father absence to larger problems of black communities, taking some attention away from traditional structural problems such as, for example, unemployment, discrimination, or educational segregation. Within the black absent-fatherhood narrative then, father absence is –if not completely– certainly partly blamed for social problems such as poverty, gang violence or low educational attainment in black communities. Being turned from primarily a consequence of other structural and historical factors, to a cause of most problems devastating black neighborhoods has

shifted some of the burden of responsibility from larger policy and social justice efforts to the individual fathers themselves, who have been repeatedly asked by presidents and community leaders alike to act “responsibly” to solve the problems plaguing their communities (see Clinton 1995, or Obama 2008).

In practice, the increased focus on fatherhood since the 1990s has resulted in a consistent yet, depending on the promoting group, widely different promotion of responsible fatherhood practices throughout society. The most important nationwide effort to promote responsible fatherhood since the 1990s has been often referred to as the Responsible Fatherhood (RF) movement, and encompasses a wide variety of policy initiatives and programs through public, private and religious institutions to encourage fathers to behave “responsibly.” Anna Gavanas (2004a) has argued that the RF movement can be divided into two wings or factions, which she terms the “pro-marriage” wing and the “fragile-families<sup>1</sup>” wing. The “pro-marriage” wing emphasizes marriage as the key to responsible fatherhood. It can be situated most clearly as a response to the larger, supposedly race-neutral narrative on absent fatherhood. The pro-marriage wing positions itself along gender lines, that is, is concerned with the differences and similarities between mothers and fathers. Its representatives argue against those social changes and movements (e.g. feminism, same gender marriages) they see as a threat to their vision of a family (see, for example, Blankenhorn, 1996, or Popenoe, 1996). The “fragile-families” wing is focused primarily –although not only– on minority and low SES fathers. It can be situated as a response to the black absent-fatherhood narrative, and positions itself most clearly in regards to other more privileged fathers, that is, it is

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1 "a family formed by out -of-wedlock birth( s) to disadvantaged parents" (Mincy and Pouncy 1999, 83).

concerned with structural and cultural factors affecting primarily minority, low SES fathers, and *not* other fathers. Although the RF movement is, therefore, supposedly united under a same banner, in practice

...the fatherhood responsibility movement displays a wide range of responses to the changing social, economic, and political conditions for fathers. Explicitly or implicitly, actors in fatherhood politics emphasize the perspectives of competing constituencies of men in asymmetric positions relative to one another, the state, and the labor market. (Gavanas, 2004a, 3)

These differences are particularly relevant when it comes to black fathers.

Because of the subordinated nature of the narrative affecting them (in relation to the race-neutral father-absence narrative) and because of the different interests and positions they represent in regards to other fathers, they are situated in the midst of conflicting social representations of fatherhood, responsibility, race, gender and family values.

Additionally, the black absent-fatherhood narrative, unlike the race-neutral narrative, has played into existing stereotypes surrounding the black family and the black father. As a narrative, in fact, it offers only two possible positions at the intersection of race, fatherhood and responsibility: that of the “deadbeat dad” or that of the “strong black father,” with the consequences of falling into one or the other having the same result: that of being made to speak to the social stereotype as either the example or the exception that proves the rule. Entrance into the discourse of responsible fatherhood as a black father would seem therefore to be uniquely impacted by three main factors: a shift of the burden of social responsibility from structural factors to the individual black fathers themselves, the wide disparity of conflicting social representations available under the RF rubric, and

the borderline racist undertones often accompanying the black absent fatherhood narrative. Within this picture then it is unclear how black men adopting responsible fatherhood as an identity and strategy for social change, understand and appropriate the term, negotiate some of its racist imagery as well as situate themselves in regards to some of the widely socially available yet often conflicting social representations on key issues such as fatherhood, responsibility, race, gender, or family values.

## **Introduction to the Research**

### **Introduction to the Theoretical Frame: Social Representations**

This study utilizes Critical Social Representations Theory to conceptualize and frame the interaction between its participants and the social contexts within which they are embedded. Critical Social Representations Theory is a branch of Social Representations Theory, and is associated, in its critical aspects, with the work of London School of Economics Social Psychology professor Caroline Howard. Its larger and better-known sibling, Social Representations Theory –founded by French theorist Serge Moscovici (1961/2008)– is situated within larger sociological and Psychological meta-theories, primarily social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. It attempts to challenge traditional experimental and positivist social psychology paradigms by arguing it is impossible to separate the individual from the social, and focusing –as a theory– on the dynamic, ongoing, and never settled process of negotiation between the self and the socio-cultural-historical context within which that self is embedded. Social representations are networks of meanings (e.g., language, images, ideas, practices, values) that facilitate communication in a social world and allow us to orient ourselves and act within it. They are highly dynamic, both constantly changing us and

simultaneously being changed by us through their ongoing social reproduction. As Serge Moscovici (1961/2008) states, social representations

circulate ceaselessly in our day-to-day world, intersect and crystallize through a word, a gesture, an encounter. Most of the social relationships we establish, most of the objects we produce or consume, and most of the communications we exchange are impregnated with them (p. 1)

Although Social Representations Theory has existed now for over four decades and has been the subject of much attention in the form of both praise and criticism (see Chapter 2), its critical version is a rather recent development (see Howarth 2011) that has garnered up until now little attention as a theory. In its critical form the theory has focused particularly on the role of power and ideology: the differences in access to systems of representation by different groups within society, the role of social representations in maintaining structures of power, and the space for negotiation and resistance by people and groups in everyday contexts. I have chosen it here as a theory because of its value as a tool. A social representation is *not* conceptualized here as a thing or a social object, but as a way of speaking about the complex interaction between human beings and the socio cultural historical contexts within which they exist. Its value for me lies in its flexibility as a theoretical tool, its attention to movement and change, the important role of agency within it, and the central role given to power and resistance in its critical version.

### **Introduction to the Researcher: Motivation and Reflexivity**

As a white European graduate student with little personal experience or background with race relations within the United States, the idea of exploring the

experience of black fathers in America seemed initially a complex and daunting task, one that was received more often than not with raised eyebrows by colleagues and peers. My point of entry into the topics of responsibility and fatherhood, however, has rarely been questioned. My own experience of fatherhood (both as a son and as a father) and the emotional complexities of that experience provided the initial fuel for my research and have added –at least superficially– some personal, experiential and face validity to my efforts. The focus on race as a key aspect of the research, on the other hand, has often been questioned given my European origin, economic background and the color of my skin, and has produced unusual yet telling responses depending on the racial make-up of the audience I’ve presented my research to. Sympathetic black peers and friends have often responded to my research with either slightly condescending smiles or suspicious, puzzled stares. Their white counterparts, on the other hand, have frequently transitioned from quizzical stares to supportive ones, their initial surprise promptly turning into praise for my effort given the supposed many needs of such population (i.e. black fathers). The tension between these two stereotypical responses –which in a way betray the historical and present realities of race relations in the United States– has been a constant personal psychological background and companion to my research, and has meant that ultimately this project has been as much a personal reflexive learning journey through race and class politics as it has a mere academic pursuit.

In an attempt to incorporate the experiential aspects above into this study I have sought to introduce a reflexive component throughout this project, most clearly seen in chapter 3, 4 and 5. This reflexive component has the purpose of achieving transparency (and therefore, qualitative verifiability) through contextualizing my journey and decisions

as a researcher. Additionally, the reflexive component serves to unsettle any possible claims to “neutral” researcher positionality that might be mistakenly derived from my writing. This work is not a neutral scientific endeavor, but a situated and politically motivated one born out of my observations of social representations of race and gender in United States’ fatherhood politics. It is born out of the tension between my beliefs in the importance of responsible fatherhood, situated within progressive ideals of gender and race equality, and the awareness of racist and patriarchal social representations dominating fatherhood politics in the United States. In revealing and highlighting my own situatedness in regards to my topic of study, I have sought to avoid what I see as impossible claims to researcher neutrality, and to increase instead researcher accountability through transparency. Opening the reflexivity floodgates has been also liberating, as it has allowed me to have a deeply personal conversation with this work that would have been traditionally excluded from a study such as this one.

### **Purpose Statement**

In this study I have sought to achieve two overarching goals, which can be conceptualized as addressing “what?” and “how?” questions on my research topic. On the one hand –and in answer primarily to the question “what?”– I sought to explore, concretely, several important aspects at the intersection of fatherhood, responsibility, race, and gender. First I sought to investigate understandings of responsibility and fatherhood of black fathers who made of responsible fatherhood an important part of their identity. Given the unusual position of my participants as both signifiers of father absence and representatives of responsible fatherhood, it was unclear how they understood responsible fatherhood, and how they arrived to their understandings. Second,



and given the wide variety of social representations under the RF rubric, I sought to explore how these black fathers positioned themselves in regard to some of the social representations on race and gender within United States fatherhood politics. Both of these aspects are important given how responsible fatherhood has been promoted by community and political leaders alike as a solution to most of the problems plaguing black communities in the United States. If, at a most basic level, we accept that at least part of the solution to these problems is the adoption of some form of responsible fatherhood practices, then it behooves us to understand how responsible fatherhood is being incorporated into the language of those at the metaphoric “front line” of this effort.

On the other hand (and in answer primarily to the question “how?”) this project can be seen -both from a meta-perspective and in its overall concrete approach to its subject matter- as an attempt to seek complexity (theoretically, methodologically, representationally) in a field often characterized by simplistic and reductionistic understandings, explanations, and representations of the plight of black fathers. This aspect of the project, although perhaps its most tentative and incomplete in the solutions it offers, is approached in a variety of ways:

1. By attempting to write about race in a way that simultaneously rejects racial terminology’s reference to biological, natural and/or essential difference while trying to retain its beneficial aspects: its power as a linguistic signifier of different social, economic, and experiential lived realities, as well as its unifying potential –and derived psychological benefits– in the struggle against racial oppression and discrimination.

2. By using a narrative metaphor throughout that pushes the reader to think of the contextual and constructed nature of any social narrative –including this study as told here– and the politically motivations that always lie at their origin and reproduction.
3. By choosing a qualitative methodology that seeks to privilege father’s experiences over demographics/statistics, all without ignoring the important consequences as well as the social impact and significance of the latter.
4. By introducing the researcher’s reflexive voice throughout the study, seeking to bring to the forefront the personal, social, cultural and political lens with which the researcher looks at the world. In combination with the use of a narrative metaphor the researcher’s reflexive voice seeks to highlight the role of context (the situatedness of the work in a specific time and place, and always under specific circumstances) and the political positionality that informs all choices made within the study.
5. By bringing together a number of theories and fields (Psychology, Sociology, Social Representations Theory, narrative theory, cultural studies, feminism, qualitative research) and different authors and perspectives in a way that makes sense given the topic, seeking complexity in its treatment while hoping to enrich the view of the subject matter in overlapping yet productive and illuminating ways.

### **Relevance and scope of the work**

It can be argued that responsible fatherhood as a significant area of study and social concern, has existed now for over 15 years. Although it has received a considerable

amount of social attention over that time, this attention has come intertwined with considerable political and moral rhetoric at all levels, making “responsible fatherhood” an idea invested with a wide variety of meanings and interests –depending on the individual or group hoisting the term and the context within which it is hoisted. In fact, responsible fatherhood can be conceptualized in a way as an ideal linguistic Trojan horse, a perfect term to push a variety of different political and social agendas, since without critical examination it is a term that elicits a positive reaction without needing much in terms of details. As Anna Gavanas (2004a) argues,

Who could say that responsible fatherhood is a bad idea? Who is going to disagree if someone says that everybody should love his or her children? On the surface, the fatherhood responsibility movement appears to unite around and resonate with a national political consensus. However, the internal divisions in the fatherhood responsibility movement illustrate how the banner of children and family masks opposing claims, grievances and stakes. Fatherhood politics and family policy can be compared to a minefield where political agents divided by race and socioeconomic class are setting off highly charged social, economic, and moral bombshells (p. 21)

As Gavanas hints at, the devil in regards to responsible fatherhood is in the details. These details become less relevant if one is not directly affected by the responsible fatherhood discourse, where the discussion can remain at a more theoretical, distant, and impersonal level. But because of the way the problem of absent/irresponsible fatherhood has been conceptualized in each of the absent fatherhood narratives described above, remaining outside of the responsible fatherhood discourse is a luxury only

currently possible under the race-neutral narrative. Entrance into the responsible fatherhood discourse within the race-neutral narrative is determined by the individual's behavior, *not* by any assumed essential characteristic of the father, allowing for a wide majority of the population (those not publicly and obviously irresponsible and otherwise mostly present in the life of their children) to not be directly affected by it. In the black absent fatherhood narrative, where the problem of absent/irresponsible fatherhood has been made a cultural, essential, or will-related integral aspect of being black, being able to stand outside of the responsible fatherhood discourse is extremely unlikely. It can be argued, in fact, that in the last fifteen years within the United States entrance into the responsible fatherhood discourse is granted merely by being a father and meeting the social ocular requirement of being black. To occupy a place at the intersection of fatherhood and blackness is therefore to have to answer to the discourse of responsible fatherhood, and the calls of politicians, community leaders and popular media figures to be "responsible" for the benefit of the black community and society at large. In regards to black fathers, then, the inescapable social call to meet an otherwise imprecise responsible fatherhood ideal, plus the social shift of responsibility of black neighborhood problems from policy/social justice efforts to the individual fathers themselves, makes the details on how responsible fatherhood is being understood by black fathers particularly important. Is responsible fatherhood, for example, being understood and taken-up in ways that emphasize traditional white-patriarchal capitalist ideals (e.g. gender inequality in power, roles, and home responsibilities) or in ways that challenge these and offer more progressive alternatives? Is absent/irresponsible fatherhood understood as the cause for the problems of the community (and, as a counterpoint, responsible fatherhood

understood as the cure to those problems), or is it perceived differently? How are black fathers negotiating the borderline racist social representations that frequently accompany social representations of race and responsible fatherhood? What is the importance given to marriage versus other possible alternatives (cohabitation, divorce, etc.)? What is the importance of biological kinship in fatherhood versus other alternatives (stepfather, grandfathers, other important male figures)? All of the details that these questions point to are important in that they help construct different views of society (past, present, and future) and promote different solutions to the absent/irresponsible fatherhood problem within black communities.

Additionally, and given the limited availability of social science studies giving voice to black fathers in relation to quantitative and demographic studies (as well as in relation to studies looking at other fathers), this study is important in providing a small counterbalance to that disparity. Doing so is particularly relevant since -as stated before- black fathers have been the focus of significant and disproportionate attention within the responsible fatherhood discourse, a disparity seen within the academic literature in how statistical and demographic studies have been privileged over qualitative studies giving voice to black fathers. This disparity in research is problematic at a number of levels. It facilitates ignoring the lived triumphs and failures of black fathers themselves as they struggle with the daily practices of fathering, and exchanges their experiences as human beings for statistical analyses that can only promote black-and-white visions of their plight. This study, therefore, is important in the effort to increase complexity in representation in an area of research where simplification and reductionism is typically the norm.

Seeking to clarify the ways in which responsible fatherhood is being understood and giving voice to black fathers themselves is therefore important given the attention responsible fatherhood has received socially and politically as a possible catalyst for social change. But this study is also important in concrete and practical ways, both for future research on responsible fatherhood, and for social programs seeking to serve black fathers. In regards to future research, it is important to point out that as a study using qualitative methodology, this study does not seek to test hypotheses, but to generate them. Although therefore it would be difficult and –given the sample size– inappropriate to extrapolate large population-wide conclusions from this work, it is nonetheless key to perform studies such as this one in order to increase understandings that can lead to better informed hypotheses-testing research in the future. Additionally, insights gathered from a study such as this one can be of help for the recruiting efforts of community programs seeking to reach and get black fathers involved, both in the programs themselves as volunteers/participants, as well as in the lives of their children as positive role models.

### **Research Questions and Methods**

In light of the problem as presented above, three specific questions are explored within this study:

1. How do black men that have made of responsible fatherhood an important part of their identity understand the term?
2. How have they come to that understanding?
3. How do they position themselves in regards to the multiple social representations at the intersection of fatherhood, responsibility, race and gender in United States fatherhood politics?

Four adult black men participating in the Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Education Programs Male/Fatherhood Involvement Program (PPSMFIP) were recruited to participate in this study. The only inclusionary criteria for participation was a personal identification with the label “black” as a racial category, and involvement in the program, as defined by attendance to monthly meetings and occasional participation in PPSMFIP organized activities. Participant’s involvement in a program emphasizing and advocating responsible fatherhood practices was used as an indication of some level of commitment to ideas concerning responsible fatherhood prior to their recruitment into the study. Engaging in responsible fatherhood practices (however responsibility is defined) in one’s personal life was not a requirement for participating in this study. It was the identification with some form of RF as an idea that is important, even if that idea is –for whatever reason– not personally followed in one’s private life, or represents merely an ideal for oneself.

In preparation for this project I looked at a wide variety of sources (e.g. public media, law and policy, political speeches, literature from non-profit organizations) exploring the range of social representations circulating fatherhood politics in the United States. I also spent almost three years attending meetings of the PPSMFIP, participating in their activities and immersing myself in the activities of the group. Different data-collection and data-analysis methods were used. In regards to data collection, I used semi-structured narrative interviews to get to black fathers’ understandings of responsibility and fatherhood (“What is your understanding of responsible fatherhood?”) and to capture narratively the process by which fathers arrived to those understandings (“How did you come to that understanding?”). This was done in a semi-structured

manner, allowing participants relative freedom to speak of whatever issues they considered important in the process of exploring their own understandings. A list of important topics (e.g. importance of marriage to RF, impediments to RF) was used as a guide to help structure the discussion in relation to the major themes present in the social science literature and the media on responsible fatherhood. Finally, in regards to data analysis, a revised version of The Listening Guide (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, Gilligan et al. 2003), a qualitative narrative-feminist interpretive method, was used to analyze the narratives. This method calls for multiple, different readings or “listeenings” of the interview transcripts that seek to deepen the understanding of the narrative and the participant’s relationship with the themes discussed.



## Chapter II: Theoretical Frame

### Social Representation Theory

“Social representations are almost tangible entities. They circulate ceaselessly in our day-to-day world, intersect and crystallize through a word, a gesture, an encounter. Most of the social relationships we establish, most of the objects we produce or consume, and most of the communications we exchange are impregnated with them”

Serge Moscovici

(1961/2008)

Relatively unknown in the U. S. academic landscape, Social Representation Theory has been a somewhat controversial yet also well-known and increasingly utilized psychological theory in Europe and South America over the last thirty years. Social Representation Theory can be placed, according to its French and 1960's origins, within what has been broadly termed French Social Theory. Theoretically, its commitments place it as a branch of larger Psychological and Sociological meta-theories, primarily social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. In practice, Social Representations Theory seeks to transcend the Cartesian split between individual and society that has plagued mainstream Social Psychology. Instead, it situates itself in the proverbial in-between, focusing on the dynamic, ongoing, and never settled process of negotiation between the self and the socio-cultural-historical context within which that self is embedded. At the core of the theory is the concept of “social representations,” which refer to a

system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history. (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii, as quoted in Howarth, 2001)

This original definition highlights how social representations facilitate our ability to orient ourselves and communicate in the world. These are not static systems, but highly malleable ones. As the word “dynamic” implies, they constantly change in the process of being reproduced in the social groups within which they circulate. As Duveen (1998) states,

The implication of this definition is not that representations are shared on the basis of the reproduction of identical thoughts and beliefs in each individual, but that, rather, representations establish a way of thinking and communicating which serves to hold a collective together. They establish, as it were, a universe of discourse in which meaningful talk can take place; but if this were established on the basis of identical representations in the minds of everyone, this would be a universe without difference, and without difference it is hard to see how any change would be possible (...)

Social Representation Theory acquires its name from French scholar Serge Moscovici’s landmark study *Psychoanalysis: Its Image and Its Public* (1961/2008), a study conducted while attending La Sorbonne under the mentorship of renowned

psychoanalyst Daniel Lagache. In this study, Moscovici sought to trace the ways in which Psychoanalysis, as a new idea, theory and movement, spread through different population groups in Paris (communists, Catholics, and “urban-liberal” groups). He was particularly interested in the different ways in which social representations of Psychoanalysis were incorporated, transformed and circulated in common-sense or layman knowledge across these different social groups. Moscovici found that psychoanalysis was incorporated, reconstructed and communicated by each different group according to the group’s motivation. Communists highlighted primarily conflict in their “psychoanalysis talk,” reflecting an overall resistance to its ideas while attempting to spread and reinforce negative stereotypes about it. Moscovici called this communication style –one dominated by ideology– propaganda. Liberal urban groups tended to do the opposite and presented little resistance to psychoanalysis, incorporating it into their worldview (or not) and speaking about it without drastically seeking to transform it. Moscovici called this communication style, marked by a lack of resistance to new ideas, diffusion. Finally, Catholics adopted a negotiated position, attempting to find ways to speak of and communicate ideas central to psychoanalysis while also trying to regulate them according to the overall teachings of the Catholic Church (Moscovici called this negotiated, didactic and controlled style of communication propagation).

Social representations are therefore collectively constructed and dynamic in nature, influencing the individual on the one hand, but also being modified by him/her as they are circulated through the contexts within which they exist. This view of the relationship between individual, society, and social representations as fluid and interdependent is the first clue to its value as a theoretical tool within this study, as it allows for black fathers,

society and social representations surrounding responsibility, fatherhood, race, and gender, to be conceptualized as interacting in dynamic ways. Howarth (2006b) has stated that the term “social representation” may be problematic, as linguistically it seems to indicate that there are both individual *and* social representations when the process of representation is always social. The individual and society “must be understood as mutually inter-dependent, constitutive and transformative... the individual is a product of her/his social environment, and produces that environment in constantly changing and dynamic ways” (Howarth 2006b, p. 702).

Beyond the social representations themselves, key to understanding Social Representation Theory –particularly in the context of this study–are Moscovici’s interest on common-sense knowledge, and his concept of *cognitive polyphasia*. Moscovici (Moscovici & Markova, 1998) has stated that with his original study on the spread of Psychoanalysis through French society he wanted to “rehabilitate common knowledge, which is grounded in our language and in daily life” (p. 376). Moscovici contrasts common-sense knowledge, influenced by myth and fantasy, to scientific, factual knowledge. For Moscovici, common-sense knowledge must be taken seriously, not as “primitive” understandings, but as sites of negotiation, creativity and transformation. Moscovici, in fact, became well known as a researcher in the United States *not* because of his condition as the founder of Social Representations Theory, but because of his research on minority influence. In this research he showed, through experimental studies, the power of minorities to influence the perceptions and decision-making process of the majority (Farr 1993). The focus on common-sense or layman’s knowledge as a possible site of contestation and creativity, and on the power of minorities to challenge the

perception and choices of the majority are particularly important in regards to this study. They help frame black fathers' understandings of responsible fatherhood not as common-sense knowledge repositories, but as simultaneous sites of both acceptance and contestation of social representations on issues such as race, gender, responsibility, and fatherhood. These ideas will be explored further below as I delve into Critical Social Representation Theory and its specific role within this study.

Additionally, Moscovici's (1961/2008) term *cognitive polyphasia*, developed in his original study on Psychoanalysis, is also of particular importance here. Cognitive polyphasia refers to how any individual or group may use, interpret and incorporate conflicting social representations in his/her regular interaction with the world. Different rationalities, beliefs, justifications and perceptions can exist within a same individual or social group. In fact, contradiction is central to the Theory of Social Representations, as it sets up the difference that propels the dynamic nature of social representations themselves. As Howarth (2006b) states,

In order for social representations to exist and to circulate in dynamic and constantly changing ways, individuals must interpret and reinterpret each and every representation open to them. Hence, representations may contain as much conflict and contradictions as conformity or consensus (p. 698)

In the context of this study, cognitive polyphasia is important as it allows for conceptualizing contradictions in black father's understandings and positions in regards to social representations of responsible fatherhood as possible sites of resistance and/or change. This, again, will be explored in more detail below when discussing Critical Social Representation Theory.

Moscovici (Moscovici & Markova, 1998) has stated that idea of social representation was developed out of Durkheim's (1898/1974) ideas on "collective representations." Durkheim differentiated between collective and individual representations. For Durkheim collective representations were static, homogeneous, and relatively unchanging entities, imposed from above (by society, the masses, specific groups) on the individual. Moscovici believed the idea of collective representations as homogeneous, stable entities made sense within traditionally structured societies where there were less competing sources of knowledge and where beliefs were practically uniform across social groups. In modern societies, where there are ever-increasing competing sources of knowledge and beliefs often vary widely across different individuals, collective representations are constantly challenged and negotiated at every social level, leading to less stability in knowledge and communication (Howarth 2011). Because of this, Moscovici "preferred the term 'social' representations on account of their dynamics, shared origin and inseparable connection with language and everyday communication" (Quenza 2005, p. 79).

Although Moscovici's immediate influence in developing the idea of social representations is Durkheim, Markova (2000) has argued that the Theory of Social Representation is philosophically situated squarely within larger Hegelian dialectic and Bakhtian dialogic paradigms. In regards to Hegel, the dynamic aspect of the theory requires a dialectic between self and other, between self and society, a tension between representations (values, ideas, beliefs, practices) which the self attempts to transcend to achieve stability, to settle meaning in an ever-transforming movement triggered by difference. Identity is conceptualized as the result of the ongoing dialectical interaction,

something that is achieved constantly in movement: the crest of the individual wave as it moves across social waters.

Social Representations Theory is also conceptualized as dialogical and relational, and inheritance of its philosophical alliances to Russian literary theorist Bakhtin (Markova 2000). The key to grasping Bakhtin's influence here is Bakhtin's concept of dialogical understanding. Hall (Hall, Morley & Chen, 1996) -speaking of Bakhtin's dialogism- states that "according to the dialogic principle, the self is constituted only through its relationship to the other; all understanding is dialogic in nature: meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers" (p. 309). In Social Representations Theory that "other" can be anything: a person, a thing, a group, a government, a sign, an action, a gesture, or an idea. As Moscovici's opening quote above states, "most of the social relationships we establish, most of the objects we produce or consume, and most of the communications we exchange are impregnated with [social representations]" (p. 3). Since meaning for Bakhtin is never settled, but an "inherently unstable domain of contestation" (Barker 2011, p. 54) stability in that dialogue is only achieved momentarily. The identity formed dialectically in our interaction with social representations is therefore always unstable.

Social Representations Theory has been historically criticized primarily along four different fronts, having to do with theoretical vagueness (Jahoda 1988, Valsiner, 1998), social determinism (Parker 1987, Jahoda 1988, McKinlay and Potter, 1987), cognitive reductionism (Potter and Litton, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Billig, 1988, Parker 2007), and lack of a critical agenda (Ibanez, 1992, Jahoda 1988, Parker 1987). Most notably, Social Representations Theory has been the focus of an extensive debate

between proponents of the theory and British discursive psychology on the merits and faults of the theory (see Potter and Edwards 1999, or Ibanez 1994, for extensive reviews of arguments and critiques from the Discursive Psychology side, or Voelklein and Howarth 2005, or Raudsepp 2005 for arguments from the Social Representations Theory side). I will briefly review each of these criticisms and the responses from Social representations Theory before addressing the lack a critical agenda through the introduction of Howarth's (2011) Critical Social Representations Theory as a conceptual frame for this study.

In regards to the lack of conceptual clarity, Moscovici has been accused of providing vague definitions and explanations of his theory (Jahoda 1988, Potter and Edwards 1999). Moscovici has answered the accusations of vagueness by stating that he intentionally avoided from the beginning providing definitions that were too restrictive, as he deemed social representations to be rather complex, and irreducible to simple propositions (Moscovici and Markova 1998). As Voelklein and Howarth (2005) also argue, part of the vagueness in definitions and explanations is the result of following an inductive, descriptive approach to theory formulation as opposed to a "hypothetico-deductive model that formulates clear guidelines for testing and operationalizing a theory" (p. 436). In this regard, Duveen (1998) has also argued that

clarity and precision in conceptual argument are the products of scientific activity, and not the precondition for its production. Science, like every form of human reflection, begins with a sense of what is troubling, of what stands in need of explanation. Phenomena need to be brought to light before they can be rendered intelligible (p. 458)



In a similar vein, Valsiner (1998) has stated in his evaluation of Social Representations Theory that “the actual theoretical elaboration has yet to take place” (p. 149) even if he believes the theory holds tremendous potential. Whatever the case, it is clear that the lack of conceptual clarity in the formulation of the theory, purposeful or not, has led to a wide variety of uses from researchers reflecting extremely diverse and often conflicting philosophical and methodological commitments. It is perhaps because of this that Social Representations Theory has also been accused of the conflicting claims of both social determinism and cognitive reductionism. McKinlay and Potter (1987) have, for example, emphasized what they see as the lack of space within the theory for human agency, stating that within Social Representations Theory the past (as in social representations coming to us from history) and the group/society in which we are embedded determine our behavior. Yet, as Voelklein and Howarth (2005) state

It is exactly through the contact with conflicting social representations that human beings begin to reflect on their own views and realize what is distinctive about the representations they hold. It is through such dialogue and conflict that existing representations are revisited and adjusted (p. 440)

Agency, therefore, is a key aspect of Social Representations Theory, necessary for dialogue and change to take place. The criticism of social determinism seems therefore, on account of how the theory is formulated, misplaced.

In regards to criticisms of cognitive reductionism, Parker (1987, 2007) has argued that the Theory of Social Representations has struggled, at least in practice, to escape cognitivism. Researchers that have adopted the theory as a conceptualizing frame have often reduced the idea of social representations to cognitive processes occurring “inside”

the individual, and conducted research on Social Representations in laboratory-experimental settings reminiscent of the “American Social Psychology they were so anxious to escape” (Parker 2007, p. 87). It is possible that the theoretical flexibility sought initially by Moscovici may have contributed to its use within reductionist perspectives, yet Social Representations Theory, as explicated above –and at least aspirationally– has always sought to transcend the traditional Cartesian individual-social divide, avoiding both social determinism and cognitive reductionism. Social representations are not cognitive schemas “inside” of human being’s minds, nor are they Foucauldian discourses subjectifying them without space for agency, but are the dialogical dynamic products of human beings’s interactions with the socio-cultural-historical contexts within which they exist. The conflicting social determinism and cognitive reductionism claims, however, point to the difficulties for researchers in grasping and speaking about a theory that has made of dialogue, movement, and the society-individual space in-between some of the main pillars of the theory. As Voelklein and Howarth (2005) argue

In many social psychological theories, the relationship between the psychological and the social is depicted as a separation of individual perception and cognition, on the one hand, and culture and social context, on the other. The unusual position of social representations as simultaneously between individuals and the societies they live in has led to the contradictory criticisms of social determinism and cognitive reductionism (p. 432)

## **Critical Social Representation Theory**

“We must ask what is the aim of the scientific community. Is it to support or to criticize the social order? Is it to consolidate it or transform it?”

(Moscovici, 1972, p. 23.)

One of the larger criticisms the Theory of Social Representations has received has been in regards to its lack of attention to the role of power: that is, to the political and ideological motivations for the creation, maintenance, spread, and effects of social representations (Voelklein and Howarth, 2005). This is surprising given that the Theory of Social Representations has, from early on, shown potential as a critical theory, primarily due to its challenge to both Cartesian dualism and traditional social psychology experimental research. In practice, however, that potential has not translated into actual critical research, with most studies remaining within safe traditional experimental social psychology grounds (Parker 2007). In this regard, Voelklein and Howarth (2005) have called social representations theorists and researchers to task, arguing that:

social representations theorists need to challenge both our critics and peers who marginalize the role of power, dialogue and resistance in the development and circulation of representations. We would suggest that empirical work in the field should build up a more explicitly critical agenda that promotes a social psychology of conflict, resistance and social participation in our understanding of the interconnections between social structures and subjectivities, culture and cognition, the social and the psychological (p. 449)

Similarly, Howarth (2006a) has stated that although “social representations theory appears to have the conceptual tools to criticize the social order, there are few studies that

have demonstrated this potential empirically” (p. 66). Clearly then, there seems to be a gap between what Social Representations Theory aims to do as a theory and what it has been used for in practice. Howarth, (2004a) suggests, as a solution, developing “a social constructionist perspective that explores the relationship between meaning (or re-presentation) and ideology from the perspectives of people in everyday contexts” (p. 360). As I hope to show, this study aims to live up to that idea and help fill such a gap in the Social Representations Theory’s literature by focusing, specifically, on the impact of social representations at the intersection of race, gender, responsibility and fatherhood on black fathers. It is motivated by the differences in social representations of fatherhood and responsibility along racial lines circulating in American society over the last twenty to thirty years, and the consequences of such differences for black fathers. Specifically, it aims to explore the ways in these fathers incorporate, negotiate or reject these representations according to how they position themselves in regards to some of the dominant social representations of race and gender within fatherhood politics in the United States. It is therefore its focus on power, ideology and resistance –plus the incorporation of a heavy researcher reflexive component to be explored below– that situates most clearly this study within a Critical Social Representations Theory conceptual framework.

The effort to propel a critical branch to Social Representations Theory is relatively new, and most clearly represented by the work of London School of Economics Psychology professor Caroline Howarth (2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2010, 2011). Howarth (2011) provides her own definition of social representations, a definition that although draws heavily on Moscovici’s original

definition, also subtly highlights the role of agency, interpretation, dialogue and the role of power in human beings' relationship to social representations. Howarth defines social representations as

A system of common values, ideas and practices that enable people to understand each other and communicate about similar issues. It also involves a degree of subjective interpretation that leads to differences in understanding, different readings of texts and therefore the motivation to communicate. Representations may be hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional (p. 3).

This definition highlights both the shared aspects of social representations and the individual subjective interpretive component that introduces the possibility for change or resistance. Without the latter, social representations would become simply social networks of meanings incorporated and reproduced by all members of a group in the same way. Instead, it is their collaborative character that allows, for example, for both ideology and resistance to exist within the same representation. As Duveen (1998) states:

Frequently social representations emerge around enduring points of conflict within the representational structures of culture itself, as, for example, in the tension between the formal recognition of the universality of 'human rights' and their denial to particular groups within society (p. 468)

Dominant social representations of the United States as the "land of equality," for example, have conflicted historically at an individual and cultural level with the experience and knowledge of many groups within the United States. At the time in which I am writing this, members of the United States LGBT community do not enjoy equal legal status as other citizens in most states within the country. Detainees in Guantanamo's

“Gitmo” prison do not enjoy the same rights as other prisoners. The “Ninety-nine percent” movement’s demonstrations have posed questions in regards to the different legal and taxation systems in play for different citizens. Representational conflicts such as these (reflecting an understanding of the United States as an equal society vs. the images, experiences and practices reflecting inequality) may co-exist at the social, cultural and the individual level simultaneously (what Moscovici originally termed *cognitive polyphasia*), with each one interacting in constant dialogue and negotiation with the others. It is here that we see the importance of common-sense or layman knowledge within the theory, not as a passive repository of ideological representations, but as a site of struggle, where facets of representations may be incorporated and spread without resistance, while others are simultaneously challenged and contested. Howarth’s reference above to representations as hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional –borrowed from Stuart Hall (1992), as we will see below– refers precisely to the role of power within representations in maintaining or resisting ideologies. Social representations that reproduce ideology without resistance (The United States as the “land of equality”) are hegemonic in nature. Negotiated social representations (“equal but separate” and “don’t ask don’t tell” policies, the term “enemy combatants,” the move towards civil unions as opposed to marriage) reflect an awareness of difference and an attempt to integrate a social representation (equality as an important democratic ideal) within an existing larger social system that privileges certain ideologies (in this case racism, homophobia, imperialism, patriarchy). Oppositional representations challenge ideology, sometimes at larger social and cultural levels (as in the Civil Rights, Gay Pride, or the Ninety-Nine Percent movements, the presence of racial/sexual minorities in non-stereotypical roles on

TV, or the pictures of prison abuses at Abu-Ghraib) or at more community or individual ones (the presence of a perfectly “normal” same-sex couple with children –or a muslim family– as neighbors). Although “hegemonic,” “negotiated,” and “oppositional” are all meant to reflect a general orientation or position towards ideology, it is also important to point to how the constantly negotiated and reconstructed nature of social representations means that what in one context (a racist society) may be an oppositional representation (Obama’s inauguration as the first black president of the United States) may be used in the service of ideology (to promote colorblind social policies or occlude large unequal racial relations) in a different context.

Howarth (2011) has argued that a Critical Social Representations Theory requires utilizing the work on communication of Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall. Howarth, in fact, utilizes Hall’s concept of “articulation” –as in a theoretical practice involving “linking two or more different theoretical frameworks in order to move beyond the limits of either framework on its own” (Procter 2004, p. 69)– to argue for incorporating Hall’s ideas into a Critical version of Social Representations Theory. Hall is one of the founders and most recognizable figures within British Cultural Studies, and one of the first academics to argue for the importance of studying culture as a key site of political struggles, “the site at which everyday struggles between dominant and subordinate groups are fought, won, and lost” (Procter, 2004, p. 26). Although Hall’s work spawns five decades and innumerable topics, its importance within the context of Critical Social Representations Theory –as conceptualized by Howarth– lies particularly in his attention to the roles of power, ideology and resistance in communication. Hall (1992) argues in his landmark study of British TV audiences that there is a lack of fit between the original

intent of a message (the production, or “encoding” moment) and the way the message is read (the reception or “decoding” moment). Because of the way meaning works, distortion is built into the system, and opens the door for different understandings, and therefore the possibility of resistance of dominant/hegemonic meanings. Hall refers to three different types of positions in the reception of a message (positions that serve to inform Howarth’s views on social representations): the “dominant-hegemonic” (where the audience receives the dominant message with barely any distortion), the “negotiated position” (where the dominant message may be accepted but its meanings in “local” contexts are challenged) and the oppositional position (the most important political moment according to Hall, where the audience rejects the dominant message).

Critical Social Representations Theory conceptualizes resistance in the context of a system in which power is not equally distributed. Certain groups have more access to systems of representation, such as the media, to privilege specific social representations over others in order to serve their own interests. Resistance is possible because of the polysemic nature of meaning, which opens the door to the possibility of adopting negotiated or oppositional positions in regards to social representations, and changing them in our re-presentation. In re-presenting social representations we are not simply vehicles but participate actively in them. One of the advantages of utilizing Social Representations Theory is that it allows for competing social representations to be reproduced in the same context by the same individual or group, allowing for the complexity of the ongoing interaction between the self and the social context within which it is embedded to be fully captured. Howarth (2004a), for example, has shown in her own research how black students within British schools both challenge and support



existing representations of race in their daily behavior, since “through trying to protect themselves against institutionalised racism, they (...) inadvertently sustain the relations of power and racialising practices that limit their possibilities at school” (p. 380).

In this study Critical Social Representations Theory is used to examine participant black fathers’ reproduction of, and positioning in regard to, social representations of race and gender circulating within fatherhood politics in the United States. In the following section I provide an overview of fatherhood politics in the United States over the last twenty years. I focus primarily on the social and political attention to fathers facilitated by the national moral panic over father absence in the early 1990s, and the social representations of race and gender circulated as a result of that moral panic.

### **Social Representations in Fatherhood Politics: Fatherhood, Race, and Gender**

The black male. A demographic. A sociological construct. A media caricature. A crime statistic. Aside from rage or lust, he is seldom seen as an emotionally embodied person. Rarely a father. Indeed, if one judged by popular and academic coverage, one might think the term "black fatherhood" an oxymoron. In their parenting role, African American men are viewed as verbs but not nouns; that is, it is frequently assumed that Black men father children but seldom are fathers.

(Coles, 2010, p. 112)

In 1978 Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) published *Policing The Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. This seminal work attempted to explain theoretically, historically and culturally the general social anxiety and fear aroused by the sudden increase in “mugging” cases in England during the 1970’s. Hall and his colleagues utilized the work of sociologist

Stanley Cohen (*Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Creation of Mods and Rockers*, 1973) to ground and interpret the English social uproar over increasing street robberies. Cohen describes moral panics as a social overreaction which takes place when a “condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (p. 9) Cohen’s theory of a moral panic usually carries as a consequence the social identification of *folk devils* –in the case above, young black men in 1970’s England– which are blamed for the problem at the core of the moral panic. Although moral panics tend to have a “real” basis, for Cohen moral panics are primarily the consequence of the way an event is constructed and represented in the media. During a moral panic, Cohen argued, exaggerated media representations of the events fuel the problem, making it worse, helping vilify entire groups of people, and challenging the capacity of both public and government to find rational solutions to the problem. Hall and his colleagues at the CCCS incorporated Cohen’s ideas into their views of reactions to mugging cases in England, but took them in a different direction, arguing that moral panics are not simply the consequence of a media-fueled feedback-loop, but reveal social anxieties about larger structural problems (such as unemployment or immigration) that get displaced onto a particular social group. Large social changes arouse social anxiety, which leads to a moral panic and the targeting of a group of people, which are turned into *folk devils*, to resolve the anxiety. In *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976/1993) Hall states that society

...deals with those fears and anxieties, not by addressing the real problems and conditions which underlie them, but by projecting and displacing them onto the identified social group. That is to say, the moral panic crystallizes popular fear

and anxieties which have a real basis, and by providing them with a simple, concrete, identifiable (...) social object, seeks to resolve them (p. 33)

Cohen and Hall's ideas on moral panics and folk devils are helpful in providing a broad lens through which to view social representations of race and gender in United States' fatherhood politics. Over the last twenty to thirty years in the United States fatherhood has been at the core of an intense socio-political-cultural debate, a debate fraught with anxieties and fears about the impact of fatherlessness on society as a whole (see Blankenhorn, 1996, Popenoe, 1996, Sowers 2010, or Erikson 1998). Rapid social, cultural and economic changes in American society over the last half of the century drastically impacted the American family, resulting in a proliferation of family formations traditionally thought of as less desirable (such as single-parent families or cohabiting couples), or that struggle to be recognized at all (such as families with same-gender couples). Parallel to these larger changes to the American family there was consistent erosion to the place of the father atop the social hierarchy (Griswold, 1993). Seen once as the head of and most important individual within the American nuclear family, the social importance of the father has become less clear, and that apparent loss of social status has spurred much social anxiety and debate. Social unsureness over the importance and place of fatherhood points to how the word "father" itself evolved from a relatively stable signifier to a term laden with questions. If images of fathers prior to the 1960's had involved clear, defined roles, such as "breadwinner" or "sex role model," from the 1960's on the ideal father type, the "new father," sensitive, nurturing, and involved in childcare, became too similar to the social representation of mothers, furthering the overall uncertainty over fatherhood (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). This

uncertainty achieved its peak in the early 1990's. Amidst increasing social problems such as poverty, rising crime rates, or unemployment, the changing patterns in family formations led to a moral panic over the supposed effects of "fatherlessness" on society.

As Blankenhorn (1996) stated:

There is a debate, even alarm, over specific social problems. Divorce. Out-of-wedlock childbearing. Children growing up in poverty. Youth violence. Unsafe neighborhoods. Domestic violence. The weakening of parental authority. But in these discussions we seldom acknowledge the underlying phenomenon that binds together these otherwise disparate issues: the flight of males from their children's lives. In fact we seem to go out of our way to avoid the connection between our most pressing social problems and the trend of fatherlessness (p. 2)

Although Blankenhorn speaks of a social "avoidance" of discussing fatherlessness as a causal factor of the "most pressing social problems," the years immediately after the publication of his work saw precisely the opposite of avoidance, with fatherlessness and its supposed consequences becoming a frequent topic in the United States media and social science literature (see, for example, Doherty et al. 1998, 2000; Erikson 1998; Horn, 1997; Horn et al., 1999; Nappa 2003; Popenoe 1996; Pruett 2000; Walker & McGraw 2000). President Clinton himself had stated one year before the publication of Blankenhorn's landmark work that that "the single biggest social problem in our society may be the growing absence of fathers from their children's homes, because it contributes to so many other social problems" (1995). As with Hall's mugging cases in *Policing the Crisis*, the moral panic over fatherlessness had –and continues to have– a real basis. In 1994 it was estimated about 19 million children lived in families without a father present

(National Center on Fathers and Families, 1996). According to the U.S. Census, as of 2009, 24 million children live in households without a father, biological or not. When taking race into account (particularly when looking at black households), the differences are even more drastic. According to the United States Census, currently two in three black children live in single-mother households. The US Census father-absence population trend helped fuel the fatherlessness moral panic. Father-absence was blamed for every social problem, from poverty, to violence, to drug use, to increased incarceration rates, to low educational achievement, to domestic violence and even the federal deficit (Gavanas 2004a). As a flip side, the adoption of “responsible fatherhood” practices began to be consistently promoted as a solution by politicians and community leaders alike. Although the moral panic over fatherlessness did not initially seem to target any specific social group beyond absent fathers themselves, if we look at it through the lens provided by racial relations, the U.S. Census family demographics were used to tell two rather different stories about fathers in American society, and to provide therefore two different social representations of fatherhood.

When looking at fathers across America *regardless* of racial background, the problem of father absence was -to use White and Epston’s (1990) narrative terminology- “externalized,” objectified in order to be represented as a social ill with potentially identifiable causes and cures. Within the race-neutral narrative of father-absence the behavior, and *not* fathers in general, became socially represented as the problem. The worrying demographics on fatherhood spurred from the early nineteen nineties on a social and political reaction directed towards reversing the trend of father-absence in America. Socially, the statistics on fatherhood led to a wide spectrum of publications,

books and news reports addressing father-absence and its effects (see above). President Bill Clinton's arrival to the White House in 1992 marked the beginning of an increased political preoccupation about the "disappearance of fatherhood." This preoccupation, in turn, became an important part of the discourse and policy of every president after Clinton, resulting in a wide range of initiatives and policies targeting fathers and families since his presidency. Although the target of many of these initiatives and policies were uninvolved fathers, fatherlessness itself was represented within the race-neutral narrative as complex and causally overdetermined, with some social forces -e.g. feminism, divorce legislation, the welfare state- blamed more often than others.

When looking specifically at black fathers, the father-absence narrative was significantly simplified and did not benefit from the "externalization" or objectification that the race-neutral father-absence narrative went through. Using again White and Epston's (1990) narrative terminology, in social representations of black absent fathers, black fathers themselves (and not their behavior) became the problem. The demographics on black fatherhood played from the beginning into a number of running themes surrounding race in America. They provided another common-sense justification for racist notions of blackness present since the times of slavery. They revived discourses on the black family that had been present and debated since senator Daniel Moynihan published his now famous report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965) -a report describing the state of the black family as a "tangle of pathology." They brought to the forefront the debate between culture and structure, and tilted -at least socially and politically- the explanatory narrative for black father-absence to the culture side (see Cosby 2004, Clinton 1995, or Obama 2008). They provided, representationally,

another suture point between “black males” and “crisis” in a long history of the pairing of both terms (see Laubscher 2005, Brown 2011). Within this context the word “responsibility,” so often attached since the 1990’s to policy and programmatic efforts to address absent fatherhood, acquired specific importance for black fathers, for whom its antonym -irresponsibility- was made representationally an integral aspect of a black father’s essence, an answer and full stop to the tracing of causes for absent fatherhood in black communities. As Lupton and Barclay (1996) state, black fathers “are often positioned as negative counterparts to the bourgeois ideal of the ‘new’ father; as ‘absent’ fathers, ‘dangerous’ fathers or ‘deadbeat’ dads” (p. 15). The black father was made, within this narrative, the signifier, the social representation of fatherlessness in America, the subcultural or internal folk devil that remained once the general fatherlessness moral panic abated.

If we think of narratives as both constraining and enabling what is possible in someone’s life, then each of these narratives presents different scenarios with different possibilities for those caught in their wake. In the former, race-neutral narrative, absent fatherhood has been socially represented primarily as an individual problem. Although it is conceptualized as a significant social problem that needs to be addressed, it is not attached, as a problem, to any particular group, but only to the irresponsible behavior of specific individuals. Within the race-neutral narrative, therefore, fathers become part of the social representation of irresponsibility or absent-fatherhood only when propelled by a father’s own specific life circumstances and choices, all of which do not impact anybody else around him except for him and those closest to him –mainly his immediate family. On the other hand and when looking at black fathers, the discourse of

responsibility/irresponsibility has been made an integral part of the social representation of black fatherhood. Because the problem in the absent black father narrative has been made to be –culturally, politically, and in the public imagination– black fathers themselves, they are made to speak to absence and irresponsibility by the mere fact of being at the intersection of blackness and fatherhood.

The persistent focus on black fathers and their representation in the media and social science literature as absent, irresponsible, childish, in peril of disappearance, etc., belongs to what Laubscher (2005) states is a larger renewed interest in the black man as “research subject and ocular interest” who is “overwhelmingly cast in the language of crisis” (p. 111). Whether in newspaper and magazine articles or in television shows, black men, and particularly black fathers, are generally portrayed as committed to what cultural critic bell hooks describes as a fate of “silent disappearance” and “passive self-sabotage” (preface, 2003). The literature and public discourse surrounding black masculinity has consistently paired both terms together in different ways (in this case as “absent fathers,” or “deadbeat fathers”). This has driven forth a particular social representation of black men in crisis which has, in turn, participated in this very world of crisis of which it speaks. Regarding this pairing, Laubscher (2005) has stated:

There is, therefore, no necessary belongingness between the elements, in this case African-American men and crisis, but that they had been articulated in discourse as real and seemingly unquestionably essential (p. 124)

Using the view of the moon from Earth as a metaphor, the social representation of black fatherhood as “in crisis” constitutes the illuminated (or, more accurately, near) side of the moon, the only side we are regularly allowed to see from the vantage point of the



media and the social science literature. Similarly to the moon, for which small surface areas come into light and become visible only briefly at specific stages in the lunar cycle, the image of the “good” or ideal black father appears only every so often in the media, supposedly as a positive counterpoint to the bad father image but effectively as the exception that proves the rule. Contrary to the narratives of “bad” black fatherhood (which tend to focus on cultural causal factors), the narratives of good fatherhood focus more on what are usually presented as unique individual outcomes that reflect traditional capitalist-protestant ideals, that is, stories of black fathers who have risen from challenging circumstances and/or poor early choices through individual effort to become exceptional fathers: responsible, strong, caring, hard working, and good role models (such as in Muccino’s 2007 critically acclaimed motion picture *The Pursuit of Happyness*). The popular face of this idealized portrayal of black fatherhood today is President Obama himself who in achieving the Presidency of the United States in 2008 as a black, college educated, caring, soft spoken married man with two daughters became the ideal black father in the white and black American mind.

Permanently outside of view, however, are all those moments of black fatherhood that do not support the “black fatherhood in crisis” social representation. The moon metaphor is particularly relevant here. An entire side of the moon -what is known as the far or “dark” side- is permanently out of sight from Earth. But what has been popularly known as the “dark side of the moon” is actually an important misnomer: this side is not dark at all (in fact it gets regularly illuminated by the sun) but simply permanently out of sight from our vantage point in Earth. In the case of black fatherhood, what remains out of sight are those moments that complicate the dominant “crisis” representation of black

fatherhood, those moments that bridge the distance between the rare image of the ideal “good” black father and the prevalent, dominant image of the “bad” black father.

If we look at the national moral panic over fatherlessness through the lens provided by gender relations, a different narrative arises. The loss of importance of the father atop the social hierarchy, the parallel incorporation of women to the workforce in massive numbers since the 1960’s, and the growth of the welfare system (and its association with poor single mothers), all contributed to creating a social representation of women, particularly liberal feminism, as the “external” *folk devil* in the fatherlessness crisis. Men’s groups such as the Father’s Rights, and the Responsible Fatherhood movements, although different in their political goals and broad positions in regards to women, came into being as a reaction to second wave feminism and its achievements (Gavanas 2004a). Of these two men’s movements, Father Right’s groups are most clearly situated within a larger Men’s Rights movement and what Susan Faludi (1991) termed “backlash”; that is, a reaction against the perceived gains of feminism for women in society. Father Rights’ groups vary somewhat in their political ideology, although focus as a whole on legal battles surrounding divorce and custody proceedings, where they claim fathers are being discriminated against in favor of women. Social representations of men and women within the majority of Men and Father Rights groups have traditionally inverted the power relations assumed in patriarchy, representing women as the powerful gender, with their power located in their sexuality and seductiveness, while claiming that men are the “true victims of prostitution, pornography, dating rituals, sexist media conventions, divorce settlements, false rape accusations, sexual harassment and even domestic violence” (Messner 1997, p. 2). Rosen et al. (2009) have stated that Father Rights groups

claim that their activism parallels feminism and other liberatory social movements such as the civil rights and gay rights movements. Father Rights groups argue that these social and political movements have gone too far, however, and that they must now work to reverse changes they perceive as harmful to men (p. 516).

Bertoia and Drakich (1993) also point, in their two-year ethnographic analysis of Father Rights groups, to the differences between the rhetoric of Father Rights group members, advocating for gender equality, and their practices, where for example, they still expect women to assume most obligations in regards to childcare.

Responsible Fatherhood programs, on the other hand, appear in the 1990's as part of the national effort to reverse the father-absence trend and are important in embodying the national effort to increase father presence in the life of children. Their positionality within gender politics is more complex than that of the Father Right's movement, with social representations of gender varying depending on the particular faction of the movement in question. In theory, all responsible fatherhood programs shared a pragmatic approach to addressing the needs of fathers, and attempted to ultimately "[counsel] fathers on how to be fathers" (Mincy & Pouncy, 2002, p. 559). In practice, however,

...the fatherhood responsibility movement displays a wide range of responses to the changing social, economic, and political conditions for fathers. Explicitly or implicitly, actors in fatherhood politics emphasize the perspectives of competing constituencies of men in asymmetric positions relative to one another, the state, and the labor market (Gavanas 2004a, p. 3)

Gavanas divides the responsible fatherhood movement into two broad groups according to ideological commitments and socio-economic interests: the "fragile-

families”[1] wing, representing specifically the interests of minority, poor and disenfranchised men and emphasizing structural factors (such as education or employment) as the key to responsible fatherhood, and the pro-marriage wing, emphasizing marriage as the key to responsibility for all men no matter their economic circumstances. The “fragile-families,” wing tends to be represented by smaller local groups that do not make of gender difference an overt group issue, except to assert the importance of men in the lives of children and families. Despite this, parts of the fragile-families wing draw on masculinist traditions in African American political and academic discourses that posit men's domination of women as a legitimate masculine claim” (Gavanas 2004a, p. 73). The fragile-family wing usually prioritizes structural factors (primarily employment) over marriage in the fight against fatherlessness, arguing that although marriage is important in responsible fatherhood, the marriagiability of men is increased through factors such as education, stable employment, or home ownership, not the other way around.

The pro-marriage wing of the responsible fatherhood movement represents the most politically conservative faction of the two (even if both publically claim to be apolitical) and is represented by larger national organizations such as The National Fatherhood Initiative or the National center for Fathering. It embraces social representations of gender as essential, that is, tied to genetic or biological differences. Pro-marriage responsible fatherhood groups make the claim that essential differences between genders translates to differences in parenting styles and roles (Blankenhorn 1991). Men provide a unique contribution to parenting, unique to them due to men’s essential difference from women. Within this social representation of gender

marriage proponents construct the monogamous, heterosexual, and married lifestyle as the hallmark of gendered normality, maturity, and morality, and they maintain that everyone who does not conform to this pattern is unfulfilled or deviant. On the basis of nature's or God's order, marriage proponents insist that for children and adults to be complete the marital union is necessary and must consist of a male and a female (Gavanas 2002, p. 44).

Marriage “domesticates masculinity” and “masculinizes domesticity” (Gavanas 2004b). Outside of marriage, men are depicted as essentially sexual and aggressive beings that struggle to restrain their impulses. Families without married parents are at increased risk of dissolution and –if the father is not present– at risk of a number of other social ills (Blankenhorn 1996). Marriage serves within this social representation the purpose of containing sexual and aggressive impulses and turning men into focused and productive members of society. Through marriage men also masculinize the domestic sphere, helping keep sons, for example, from becoming too feminized. As Dowd (2000) states,

Many contemporary concerns about fatherhood have echoes in the past, and are often strongly connected to fears about over feminizing boys, as well as a presumption about the rightness of strict gender roles and gender hierarchy (p. 37).

When looking at United States fatherhood politics through the lens provided by gender relations, then, the fatherlessness moral panic has been often conceptualized as a direct result of the social advances of women’s movements, particularly liberal feminism, and their consequences for the family and society as whole. Social movements such as

the Father Rights and the Responsible Fatherhood movement appear as a reaction to the gains of second wave feminism, and endorse, to different extents, social representations of gender difference as essential and grounded in biology. Fathers are seen within these social representations as unique in their role as fathers, helping masculinize the family and protect them against other social ills (such as poverty or criminal behavior). At the same time, outside of marriage men are often represented as hypersexual and aggressive. In this context, marriage has been promoted –primarily, although not only– by pro-marriage responsible fatherhood groups as the key to stopping the fatherlessness crisis and saving society from both the effects of un-socialized males and of single women raising children on their own (Gavanoas 2004a).

### **Chapter III: Method**

## **Role of Researcher**

### **Why reflexivity?**

Over the last twenty to thirty years there has been an increased interest within the qualitative research field in exploring and accounting for the influence of the researcher on the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The increased interest in the researcher's influence is a consequence of philosophical and methodological challenges to traditional ideas about objectivity dominating positivistic and quantitative research paradigms. Central to the idea of objectivity as understood within these paradigms was: 1) that the same laws applying the study of natural sciences could be used in the human sciences and, 2) that the researcher could stand "outside of" that which she was researching, eliminating completely her influence on the research. The challenge to this conceptualization of objectivity put both of these ideas into question and carried a number of theoretical and methodological consequences. One of the more important consequences was bringing the researcher into focus and problematizing her role in the research, from her motivation in doing the research, to the lens with which she looked at her "object" of study and her respondents, to the overall choices made over the course of the study. The increased focus on the researcher in turn brought forth the need to both explore the multiple ways in which the researcher's subjectivity influenced the research, as well as to find ways to account for the impact of the researcher's influence in transparent and rigorous ways. The process of both exploring and accounting for the influence of the researcher's subjectivity on the research process has been referred to as reflexivity. As Doucet and Mauthner (2008) summarize from previous conceptualizations of reflexivity,

Reflexivity means reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents. Reflexivity also means acknowledging the critical role we play in creating, interpreting and theorizing research data (Du Bois, 1983; Harding, 1992; Maynard, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1983, 1993) (p. 121)

A reflexive component has become a requirement within any qualitative research study: it both clarifies the researcher's role as co-creator of the research and helps situate the claims made when the research is done. This last aspect (that of verification or validity) is particularly important, since despite a lack of universal agreement on how to establish validity within qualitative research, "most who do qualitative work agree that the validity of all research is heightened by ensuring that research procedures remain coherent and transparent, research results are evident, and research conclusions are convincing" (Given, 2009, p. 910) Reflexivity facilitates this process by helping answer "why?" questions surrounding theory, motivation, and procedures along the various stages of the research process.

Carla Willig (2001) has argued that there are two main types of reflexivity, personal and epistemological. Personal reflexivity involves an exploration and accounting of the ways in which the researcher's history, values, social identity, political commitments, as well as other subject positions influence and are in play in the study's conceptualization, process and outcomes (for example, how does my condition as an ocularly white european "other," or my privileged economic background influence both the lens with which I view and speak of my participants? How likely is it to impact the



responses they provide?). Epistemological reflexivity on the other hand involves an exploration and accounting of the underlying assumptions that theoretical and methodological commitments carry about the topic and participants involved. Ultimately, good epistemological reflexivity should reflect on the implications of making specific theoretical and methodological commitments while remaining open to alternative perspectives/possibilities.

I have attempted to address personal reflexivity in this study primarily in two different sections. Over the next section I address my biases and positions coming into the study and how these impact this research project from the outset. I have termed this type of positionality “static” as it comprises the wide number of relatively stable presuppositions and assumptions about the world I bring to the research itself. Although over the long run in my life these are also in flux, they ultimately reflect somewhat settled and general core aspects of who I see myself to be at the time of taking up this project. Additionally, and given the socio-economic and cultural differences between my respondents and me, I also attempt within this section to address how I see these differences impacting the study. This includes an exploration (unavoidably speculative at the time of writing, although ultimately grounded in theory) of how issues surrounding identity, power and difference between my respondents and me set the stage for, and possibly change this study.

Beyond this reflexive exploration of my static positionality, my method of data analysis includes an extensive personal reflexive component (see below under “Data Analysis Procedures”) designed to capture the impact of the narratives of the respondents on the researcher. I have termed this type of reflexivity “dynamic” as it involves a

response or reaction to participants' narratives that attempts to capture reflexiveness in motion, a "bouncing up" of the static positionality described above against the reactions and narratives provided by respondents. Roberts and Sanders (2005), Doucet and Mauthner (2003) and Doucet (2008) have argued for reflexivity as temporal and in flux. I try therefore to capture personal reflexivity within this study along two moments in time, allowing for the impact of the research process to be seen on the researcher himself. Despite this attempt to capture reflexivity in motion, I am also aware of the limitations of reflexivity, and that

[...] it is important to be cautious about how much we can know about what influences us in research. It may only be partway through our research projects, or indeed many years later that our reflexive processes come into full bloom (Doucet, 2008)

Clearly then any reflexive picture, however extensive, must be always considered incomplete. The goal is not to get to a reflexive absolute "Truth," but instead to provide a slice-in-time picture that attempts to represent as transparently as possible the impact of the researcher on the research itself, always as seen by the researcher over a specific period of time.

Finally, I also attempt to address epistemological reflexivity in different sections of this document. Primarily, and within this chapter, I address the methodological choices made in the construction of this study, the reasons behind these, and the consequences these have (inasmuch as I can see them) for the study itself. Then the reflexive component built into my method of data analysis will allow me to also address the appropriateness of the theoretical lens with which I have chosen to see my participants,

that is, the appropriateness of the theoretical bulwarks that sustain the study epistemologically. Finally, the conclusion section of the dissertation will provide a space in which to reflect on the epistemological choices made in light of the results, all while also evaluating whether other theoretical and methodological choices may have been more appropriate and/or could prove useful in future studies.

### **Personal reflexivity**

#### ***On being fathered: Heads or tails?***

One of the assumptions that guides this study is that our relationships to our own fathers contributes in large measure to how we see fatherhood. This is clearly not a far-fetched assumption; several major psychological theories (such as psychoanalysis or humanistic psychology) point to a likely relationship between our experience as sons/daughters and our aspirations and future behavior as parents. Nevertheless, the exact nature of the relationship between our experience as sons and our behavior as fathers is not clear, not necessarily reciprocal (to have grown without a father does not by default equate absenteeism as a father later in life) and seems dependent on too many factors to identify with certainty. Whatever the case, my own thinking on fatherhood assumes that the meaning given to our experience as sons has a role in determining how we see fatherhood, who we want to be as fathers, and ultimately who we become as fathers.

Although my interview does not directly ask participants to speak of their experience as sons (for reasons explored below and having to do with wanting to limit my direct influence on their responses), it is assumed that the open-ended format of questioning regarding responsibility and fatherhood will lead many of the participants to address those experiences. In my case, my experience as a son affects all of my thinking

on fatherhood: it provides a important personal frame for my experiences as a father, for how I read texts on fatherhood, as well as for several of the choices made within this study. Because of the likely possibility that my experience of being fathered will influence how I see my respondents, I outline it briefly below.

My experience of being fathered is marked by two male figures, my biological father, a Spanish well-known film director, and my (step)father, a Chilean cinematographer who came into my life when I was four, and became the only daily father I have known. Although throughout my youth my feelings about each were conflicted and fluctuated often from one extreme to the other, with time they each have come to represent different ends of the responsible fatherhood continuum. My biological father, although not entirely absent, was not involved in my upbringing, and showed little interest in me whenever we saw each other. My knowledge of his sexual escapades while he was in a relationship with my mother, his astonishing capacity to forget my birthday (or any other important event in my life for that matter), and his seeming lack of interest in any of his children, have unfortunately made him a role model on how *not* to be a father. To be fair, he does not occupy the “worst father” spot in the continuum; my image of him has always been that of a charming, talented, funny individual, a distant friend with whom I can laugh with when we meet, but, unfortunately, easily forget about when I am away.

My stepfather, on the other hand, took seriously his role as a father to me from day one, and became very involved in my upbringing. Although growing up our relationship was often difficult, with time I came to appreciate his wisdom, love, care and daily involvement. He was a constant presence in my life, when things were going badly

and when things were going great, and I can easily trace any of my life triumphs to his encouragement, persistence and unrelenting belief in me. He, then, occupies that “good” father role model spot in the responsibility continuum. The contrast between his image as a father versus the image of my own biological father has dominated most of my thinking on fatherhood since. The drastic differences between my biological father and my stepfather are relevant, as I have struggled to see at times in my life the gray areas between the black-and-white images of fatherhood they represent. This struggle is an issue in my own experience of fathering my children; to not be as good as my stepfather is to instantly occupy my biological father’s spot in the continuum.

The contrasting experience of being fathered by such different father figures is also relevant to some of the specific themes identified in this study. My stepfather, unlike my biological father, is not biologically related to me, and yet became a father through his ongoing daily engagement in my life. This provides a reflexive clue on how I have personally come to see fatherhood. Detached in my own lived-experience from biology and essence, fatherhood to me is a title one earns, a daily engagement (perhaps then better referred to as “fathering”) that in my mind has little to do with blood and biology and all to do with choice and action. Additionally, my biological parents were never married, and my stepfather and my mother remained unmarried for almost thirty years. Their relationships speak to different levels of commitment that can occur outside of marriage, and positioning me experientially outside of the belief that marriage is a necessary pre-requisite for responsible fatherhood to occur. Finally, both my biological father and my stepfather were economically well-off. Their choices in regard to responsible fatherhood, therefore, were not negatively affected by their economic status,

a privilege that many fathers do not enjoy.

Complicating the issue further –and also of particular relevance to this work– are issues surrounding identity and difference between both of my fathers. Growing up in Spain my biological father represented an intellectual elite. His fame, talent, economic privilege, and racial normative status and Spanish nationality meant that he fell squarely within what most Spaniards would consider “normal” in regards to identity, and within the socially admired/privileged in regard to class and intellectual status. My stepfather, on the other hand, was an immigrant from South America with a thick accent, dark skin and an outgoing personality. His appearance gave him away as racially “other,” and frequently tainted the perception of others before they would get to know him. The fact that he became my mother’s partner (my mother being a Caucasian foreigner also falling within the admired elite) granted him an unusual social status as both South American –and therefore an inferior immigrant “other”– and within the privileged, a status that often caused others to question him and his motives in ways that a Spanish man would have never been questioned. Growing up, I remember others in the neighborhood, school, and even within my own family, automatically attributing personality characteristics to his ethnic background and using demeaning racial epithets to describe him. This contrasted with the admiration and respect he induced in those that took the time to know him. For me, his presence made me very aware from early on of issues related to diversity, difference, racism, and privilege in complicated ways that both highlighted my own privileged status while also partially confronting me with the realities that being racially “othered” entailed. These experiences made me more susceptible to question and to critically examine any statements or facts presented about

those who do not fall within the norm of what is expected within society, or who have been traditionally “othered” by the majority.

Finally, of significance also are my stepfather’s political beliefs, and the influence they had on my upbringing. Politically a staunch Marxist, my stepfather passionately took the side of the less economically powerful in most conversations about controversial social issues. It was obvious from early on in my life that his entire being was driven by a concern for justice, by the preoccupation for others less privileged than him, and by a disdain towards social injustice, discrimination, corruption, and any political, corporate or personal abuse of power. This drive was evident not only in conversation, but also in action, as I observed him assertively standing up for his beliefs daily in his life, whether in minuscule daily matters or in potentially life-changing affairs. My stepfather’s political and ethical positionality, I believe, have been influential in my own development. I share many of his political views and find myself agreeing with him regularly in his assessments of the political and social issues of our time. This study is, in fact, beyond the focus on fatherhood, motivated by a concern for social justice, racial and gender inequality and the effects of ideology, all aspects which I believe speak to the influence of my stepfather’s political beliefs.

***On being a father: the call to ethics.***

Over the last three years I have volunteered with other fathers in a program that now serves as a recruitment site for this study. The program is designed to engage fathers and significant male figures in the lives of their children. My initial decision to give my time to the program and not simply participate as an outside researcher was born out of a shared interest: I was also the father of a then 3-year-old child and had similar concerns

as the men volunteering there. My work as a volunteer in the program has been rewarding and has given me a relative insider status based on my time commitment, shared interest, and shared condition as a father of a young child. It is the meaning of this last aspect –my experience as a father– that I will attempt to reflexively explore here, since in a way it is precisely this that I will be asking my participants to do.

My first son was born in 2005. Although looking back at it now the story told is one of beauty, love, and rapture, it didn't always seem that clear. The pregnancy was not the result of careful family planning or a well thought-out desire for a child, but an accidental, surprising pregnancy that initially rocked our marriage and set off waves of uncertainty about the future. The moment of my son's birth did come with the typical happiness and overall emotional intensity of the birth of a first child, but also with the personal uncertainty and fear of bringing a new life into a tremendously unjust and cruel world, and the overwhelming sense of responsibility and duty that parenthood can, and often does, engender. It is this moment also that, not surprisingly, planted the first seed for this study.

This study, then, is born not only from my experience as a son, but out of my experience of becoming a father, and the questions that this new fatherhood brought forth for me about the meaning of fatherhood and the responsibility it engendered. At the time of my son's birth I was overwhelmed by responsibility –a responsibility not just for my him, but for the world in which he was set to grow up. To have a son or a daughter, I instinctually realized then, is to have a stake in the future, to be unable to understand the what-is-to-come as belonging only to oneself, but instead as something that belongs to another human being. Although one can arrive to this understanding outside of



parenthood, I believe parenthood provides the emotional structure that most forcefully confronts us with the ethical dilemma that leads to that understanding. Fatherhood to me meant, at the most basic level, that I could not turn my back anymore to a world I considered cruel and unjust, but that I had to attempt to find some way to try to change it for the sake of a son who would hopefully continue to occupy it long after I was gone.

These reflections on my newfound fatherhood led me to seek the theoretical fatherhood-responsibility link that I felt experientially. Having sensed the shadow of my own biological father within me –and the threatening possibility he symbolically represented of not participating in the daily life of my son– I was particularly interested in what made the difference between accepting the responsibility of fatherhood and/or turning away from it. Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) and Algerian-French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) provided the foundation on which I processed and arrived at my own understanding. Although an extensive discussion of both of these authors' philosophical oeuvre is beyond this project, I will attempt to outline briefly what specific ideas of theirs influenced my thinking on fatherhood and responsibility, hopefully illuminating how those ideas impact this study.

### *Levinas*

At the time of the birth of my son I was becoming very interested in Levinas' thought, who over his lifetime challenged traditional philosophy by prioritizing ethics over other branches of philosophy, such as ontology and epistemology. For Levinas, we are always born in a world with others, and it is the encounter with another that marks the beginning of intelligibility (Levinas, 1998). The encounter with the other compels our response, a response that begins to happen before our own understanding of it –in the

trace of a gesture, an expression, or an emotion. Levinas states in *Ethics and Infinity* (1985) that it is in the face-to-face encounter with the other that we experience the call for ethics, which appears in its most basic form –inscribed in the face of the other– as the commandment “thou shall not kill.” The call for ethics is not an ontological necessity (one can kill, torture, or ignore the other), but an ethical exigency. It is an order we can disobey because the face, while calling for ethics, also represents exposure and is therefore vulnerable to our violence, whims and desires.

Levinas seems to take the significance of this face-to-face encounter with the other further in the case of the relationship between a parent and a child. When looking at filiality (and therefore, although not only, fatherhood) Levinas finds a mysterious relationship where one becomes other and survives. Regarding this relationship, Oliver (1997), speaking of Levinas, states:

The space between the father and the son opens up infinite time...the father discovers himself in the son and yet discovers that his son is distinct, a stranger (p. 49)

In the face of the son the father is confronted with an other that is not wholly other, and yet is. It is a peculiar, unique relationship that straddles the self and the other. It is a bridge between me and the other, between me and, ultimately, the world. The commandment “thou shall not kill” would seem –out of necessity– to acquire a unique characteristic in the face of the son, a son who is not “just” another, but who is also us. It is a call beyond a negation, beyond “though shall not kill.” It is a call for care, for responsibility, for action. The face of the son calls us to care, to give, to reach outside of ourselves. This is not, again, an ontological necessity (I can, after all, also turn away from

my son), but an ethical exigency, in this case one that is much harder to ignore, to turn away from. In the face of the son the call for ethics is strongest.

*Derrida*

Shortly after the birth of my son I was also introduced to the work of philosopher Jacques Derrida, who became important in my understanding of the strong sense of responsibility for the world I had consistently experienced since my son's birth. Of particular importance in that regard is Derrida's book *The Gift of Death* (1995), where he takes themes dealing primarily with moral and ethical responsibility. Although a magnificent work throughout, I will focus primarily here on ideas found in his third essay (*Whom to Give To*). As it is typical of Derrida, in this essay he uses someone else's work -in this case Soren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (2002/1843), to speak of his topic of choice, in this case responsibility and ethics.

Derrida argues, as Levinas had also done before him, that every other is completely other, an absolute singularity that remains ultimately unknowable to us (the French tautological statement that titles his fourth essay in the book, *Tout Autre est Tout Autre* -every other (one) is every (bit) other- is meant to capture this idea). It is a move that playfully yet powerfully links singularity and sameness: to be other is to be infinitely so, and therefore to be the same in that infinite singularity as every other other. Derrida, however, will expose the problem that this move causes when attempting to differentiate between human beings and God, and our ethical obligations to each:

If God is completely other, the figure or name of the wholly other, then every other (one) is every (bit) other. *Tout autre est tout autre*. This formula... implies that God, as the wholly other, is to be found everywhere there is something of the

wholly other. And since each of us, everyone else, each other is infinitely other in its absolute singularity, inaccessible, solitary, transcendent, nonmanifest, originally nonpresent to my ego (...) then what can be said about Abraham's relation to God can be said about my relation to every other (one) as every (bit) other, in particular my relation to my neighbor or my loved ones who are as inaccessible to me, as secret and transcendent, as Yahweh. (pp. 77-78)

This move presents a dilemma when thinking of responsibility: for Derrida, it is an act paralyzed by contradiction: the moment in which I become responsible for another, I am immediately also responsible for every other other (*tout autre est tout autre*), a responsibility that in reality I can never fully take on. In choosing a charity to donate to, I am also aware that there are other charities just as, or perhaps more worthy of my donation that will not directly benefit from my choice. The moment of responsibility also immediately betrays it: in responding to ethics I can only sacrifice ethics, the ethics that oblige me to provide the same response to every other other. In moving my son to a better school district I am fulfilling my promise and responsibility to him, but also simultaneously and unintentionally failing every other child that does not have, for a variety of reasons, that possibility –a clear betrayal of the call to ethics I have argued that my son represents.

#### *Answering the call to ethics*

Levinas' ideas of ethics and Derrida's conceptualization of responsibility provided a way to understand my experience of fatherhood. Fatherhood for me was one of the few moments in life in which I was called on to take on the responsibility for something beyond myself in a unique, specific, life-altering way. It was a call outside of

an economy of exchange, outside of the act of giving with an anticipation of a return. In fatherhood men are called to love, to give without reserve, without the expectation of future remuneration or recognition. It's a gift that situates us outside of the self as traditionally understood in Western societies (as a bounded, self-contained individual). By accepting fatherhood we are not anymore only responsible for our actions, but also – infinitely symbolically so– for the actions of another human being on Earth. The call of fatherhood makes us hostage to a son or daughter who has little to give in return, and who, as infinitely other, may or may not follow our wisdom, advice or wishes, or tragically perhaps, even love us in the future. In situating us outside of the self, the call for responsibility in fatherhood also carries embedded within it the instinctual awareness that to answer it is to also accept responsibility for other others, others no different from our children that inhabit our neighborhoods and cities. The weight of that unfulfillable, spreading responsibility can be too heavy of a burden, resulting in men turning away from its call, from reasons varying from real life environmental limitations (economic, etc.), to selfishness (a rejection of giving, or a turning towards oneself) or fear (an anxiety aroused by the vulnerability inherent to care).

In my personal life, and in order to survive the difficult call to ethics opened up first by my son's birth, I have had to regularly renegotiate its meaning, make choices that have not always ideally lived up to it, and live with the failures that those choices have exposed me to. To be a father to me is to be constantly aware of my limitations and faults as a human being, and despite the impossibility of completely doing so, to attempt to conquer them in a perpetual Sisyphean struggle, a struggle driven by love. It is a struggle –not unlike that lived by many other fathers– that shows the potential of children to open

men up to the question of ethics, a potential, I believe, unlike that found in any other human relationship. Although there are other moments in life that can also do that (I am thinking here particularly of an existential awareness of death, in oneself or the other) none of them, in my mind, are as powerfully and simultaneously oriented towards the other and the future as fatherhood is.

I am arguing –at least from an experiential point– that facing fatherhood inherently and forcefully opens up the question of ethics. The answer we provide (including possibly turning away from ethics) is ultimately shaped by the realities we live in, as well as the meanings we give –and are socially and culturally given– to our experience of fatherhood. These lived realities and meanings in turn determine the type of father one can become. This last aspect is important in the conceptualization of this study. The meaning of fatherhood and the responsibility it entails, whether formulated by us or given to us by others, sets the frame for the type of fathers we can be, determines what is considered responsible and irresponsible and, ultimately, how we face the question of ethics.

In my case, the meanings attached to fatherhood and responsibility, many already given by cultural norms and expectations, are the result of a specific developmental experience as a son, my own experience as a father, and my own interest and investment in the topic. My condition as privileged in terms of skin color, economic background/status, and educational possibilities increased the leeway in my experience of fatherhood. Part of the argument that serves as a backdrop to this work, though, is that this may not be so in the case of black fathers, who by the mere condition of meeting the ocular requirement of being black are immediately placed in the middle of a complex

range of social representations at the crossroads of responsible fatherhood and race in the United States. These social representations saturate meanings and help determine and limit the types of fathers they can become, all while allowing for little space to formulate personal meanings away from them or renegotiate expectations without risking cultural and social condemnation. This clear experiential difference between me and my participants hides within it an observed, important similarity. Just as my imaginary life is dominated by two diametrically opposed images of fatherhood that challenge my capacity to live happily within the more realistic gray area in-between, black fathers in the United States seem to be only allowed two possible positions as fathers: that of the perfect, strong black father, or that of the deadbeat serial father, eliminating from social representations of black fatherhood all the complex ways in which fatherhood is actually lived in the day-to-day life of any man.

*Along the lines of difference.*

The critical issue should not be difference, but the *difference* difference makes.  
(Rhode, 1991, p. 313, italics in original)

My condition as an ocularly white European other and as a foreigner presents a challenge in regard to the population (black fathers) that I've proposed to study. This is an important factor that requires careful reflexiveness. Although the play of difference between researcher and researched is always present in some form or other no matter what the research, the lines that separate me from my respondents along race, ethnic background, culture, social class, citizenship, and so on are numerous and have been imbued with meaning by a long histories of conflict and struggle that are likely to impact this study. Given this, I will attempt within this section to reflexively clarify how I see

and account for the impact of difference, all the while also exposing some of the personal biases I bring along to the study, in the hope of providing transparency throughout.

I have in Chapter I provided arguments for why the selection of the sample makes sense given both statistics and the political, media, and academic discourses surrounding black fatherhood. But in the face-to-face interaction with my participants those theoretical arguments have less sway than in an academic document. As a ocularly white European researching black men in America I am re-enacting a historical drama that would be at best naive and at worst a sign of profound ignorance and/or malice to ignore. Whether we consider the history of slavery in America as a whole and the numerous scientific attempts at justifying it, or whether we look at specific scientific studies driven –always under the guise of science– by racism (such as, for example, the 1950s-1970s famous Tuskegee experiments on syphilitic black men) to look at the history of scientific research conducted by whites on the black population within the United States is to look at a history of abuse and betrayal. This history in which I, through the play of difference, am an unwilling yet obviously active participant, presents ethical, theoretical and practical challenges. I see these challenges and their solutions as all intertwined, but I address them here separately to clarify the different levels at which they play a role in this study.

At the level of ethics the most clear, obvious challenge presented by difference is that of not repeating the historical pattern of direct abuse as highlighted above, but also – and this challenge is more subtle, but not less important– of not perpetuating particular discourses surrounding race that that have served to justify prejudiced attitudes against individuals based on skin color and other physical characteristics usually attributed to



race (see Brown, 2011, or Laubscher, 2005). In regard to the former, the process of completing a dissertation includes a number of checks (going through IRB approval, ongoing faculty supervision, as well as incorporating several validity/verification steps (see under “Validity/Verification Procedures” below)) that decrease significantly the chances of obvious abuses to take place. Additionally, my methodological choices have been made partly to insure that my participants’ voices are heard with the least distortion possible, and that if that distortion occurs without my awareness it is within a context in which the process by which it happened is reflexively transparent.

In regards to avoiding perpetuating negative discourses surrounding race, the task is more difficult and requires a subtle but important differentiation. There is now wide scientific consensus that the concept of race is best understood as an idea that we ascribe to biology, not a biological reality (Adelman & Herbes-Sommers, 2003). Although “only” an idea, race has historically had very real consequences and continues to insidiously do so (see West 1993, Kozol 2005, Wise 2009, 2010) for individuals whose physical attributes place them in groups traditionally discriminated against, as well as for those who have been privileged as a result. In the case of ocularly black men –and as Brown (2011) or Laubscher (2005) discuss– one of the ways in which the idea of race has been deployed is by consistently coupling it with crisis and masculinity in a way that makes it seem as if all elements are one and the same: to be a black man in the United States is to be in crisis. By working within a frame that takes the dominant social representation of that unity as a starting point (black fathers and crisis), I risk participating in and perpetuating it without intending to. It is therefore important here to point out again that this study attempts to trace the influence of social representations

surrounding responsibility, fatherhood, race and gender on the individuals they have been made to affect most clearly in society (ocularly black men) without necessarily –unless the contrary is obvious in the existing literature– challenging the evidence that serves to sustain and keep them alive as truth claims. Although I introduce a literature review that attempts to cover a range of social representations on the themes discussed the study itself is not meant to directly empirically challenge any of them. If certain social representations are more readily available, drawn from in narrative, and accepted by my participants as truths it will provide evidence of the power and influence of such social representations in their narratives as black fathers, but not necessarily as evidence that these representations do a better job representing their realities. Like Laubscher (2005), I consider human beings active agents in their lives, but they are so in contexts not always of their own choosing, contexts where certain social representations may have been historically, socially, and/or culturally privileged over others, making them more likely to be drawn from in narratives about the self without necessarily increasing their truth value.

In the realm of theory, the difference between me and my participants requires also that I go further than simply being familiar with the literature touching on black fatherhood. I have strived to be respectful of the differences between me and my participants –how theory may have been used to justify unequal status in the past,– careful of the consequences that any decisions made at the level of theory and conceptualization can have on my participants and future research, and aware of the differences in lived-experience between me and my participants and how those may play out in the reading of the data. Thinking of the impact of difference at the level of theory calls for a hermeneutics of suspicion so as to insure that my reading and application of

theories does not essentialize participants along the lines of difference –that I don’t associate behaviors, statements, and so on, to biological characteristics only attributable to one particular group of people and not to any other– and that I don’t speak for my participants in ways that betray their trust or are inaccurate given their narratives. Because of this I see the reflexive component intertwined throughout this study as essential in providing transparency to my motives and reactions, avoiding as much as possible misreadings and misinterpretations, and making me accountable to both readers and participants throughout. Finally –and as stated above when referring to ethics– I believe the methodological choices made (qualitative, narrative, feminist) are key in helping avoid most of these pitfalls, as they represent long traditions of research methodology that have made some of these concerns paramount to their development as research methods.

Finally, and at the level of the practical work required for the completion of this study, some challenges posed by difference are immediately obvious. First, in the data collection stage of the study participants may have wondered why someone like me (representing drastic differences along race and citizenship, but also possibly social class, educational achievement, etc.) was specifically interested in the meaning of responsible fatherhood for them “as black fathers.” This practical problem points to the ways in which the interview situation –important nuances aside– is a reenactment of Du Bois’ (2007) question (“How does it feel to be a problem?”) and risked from the beginning getting a similar answer (“I answer seldom a word.”) This is a challenge for which directing my participants to academic differences between discourse and “reality” would simply not have worked: that I may consider “black” and “white” social labels not

corresponding with essential differences does not deny the very different consequences those terms –as lived realities– carry. So, even though I may not personally identify as white, I am white in that I benefit from the privileges that everyday are afforded to those sharing a similar skin pigmentation with me. I reside in an upper-scale, safe and primarily white neighborhood where I had no trouble finding and purchasing a home, where I am made to feel like I belong, and where to be any other color is to be the recipient of curiosity and attention beyond that given to the white majority. Additionally, my economic/social class background speaks of privilege beyond that of the average United States citizen, let alone that specifically of an average black one. Both because where I fall along skin color and economic status I have been given opportunities (educational, occupational, etc.) that are not afforded to many, and that, when they are, do not usually come with as much flexibility and as many second chances as I have enjoyed. Given all of this, I am clearly in a position of privilege in regards to my participants that goes beyond the researcher-researched relationship and that is signified most clearly -although not only- in my skin.

Although every layer of the privilege I embody may have not been immediately evident to all participants during the interviews, those that were -including skin pigmentation- could have affected their trust, honesty, level of disclosure, as well as engagement in the process. The initial question therefore becomes what to do about this possibility, that is: should the effect of difference be ignored, ameliorated as much as possible, or embraced as part of the study? Ignoring difference is an immediate ethical *faux pas* for reasons already explored above. In regards to the possibility of ameliorating for the effect of difference, the last three years spent volunteering in the program that

serves as a site for this study and my known condition as a father of a young child gave me a relative insider status and should -at least theoretically- have ameliorated some of the effects of difference, but –and this is most important– they did not, nor could they ever, erase them. As Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) point out

Whether the researcher is an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants, the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation (p.55)

The researcher’s personhood is always present. The complexities of the interplay between sameness and difference make it extremely difficult to predict the ways in which these affected the research interviews, and –it is safe to assume– change the data in ways that other aspects of sameness and difference perhaps would not. But the practical challenge posed by difference (that it may have restricted access to the participant’s “truth”) can only be so if we conceive of truth by using a mining metaphor, as if truth is something independent and reified that exists inside participants, like gold nuggets we dig for (Kvale 1996). Instead, theoretical and methodological commitments in this study point to a conception of truth akin to a Heideggerean *aletheia* or a Gadamerian fusion of horizons, a process of unconcealment (Packer & Addison, 1989) taking place in every stage of the research, from the conceptualization, to the literature review, to the interview, to each reading –mine, my dissertation committee’s, my participants’, and any future “others” I cannot account for. Within this view the researcher begins the unconcealment process by bringing together, constructing, and unveiling a narrative from

various sources (his own story, the academic literature, popular media, etc.) and according to specific rules –a narrative within which participants’ own narratives are elicited, interpreted and ultimately incorporated. Narratives are “socially situated interactive performances –as produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes” (Chase 2005, p. 656). Whether difference results in a participant’s distance, collaboration, suspiciousness, avoidance, openness, or anger towards the researcher –to mention a few possible reactions– all produce and unconceal specific truths about human experience in the context in which that reaction occurred –in this case as elicited by me and the difference and sameness I embody. The reflexive component included in my method of analysis, apart from enhancing validity through transparency, is meant to help provide another layer of unconcealment designed to also be attuned to the effects of context and difference from the point of view of the researcher. A clear limitation of this design, made evident by this last point, is the lack of a similar extensive reflexive component from participants, a limitation that is the result of some of the unavoidable practical limitations (time, deadlines, resources, etc.) I am faced with in completing this study.

### **Epistemological Reflexivity**

#### ***The Qualitative vs. quantitative paradigm***

Within the social sciences, qualitative and quantitative research paradigms have been traditionally placed in drastic opposition to each other. Broadly -and admittedly quite simplistically- quantitative research refers to research methodologies dealing primarily with measurement and quantification, while qualitative research refers to research methodologies concerned primarily with descriptive, interpretive and naturalistic

forms of inquiry. Donmoyer (2008) has argued that the typical distinction between qualitative and quantitative research -one relying on the linguistic difference between “qualities” and “quantity”- is a problematic one, as in practice none of the two factors of the equation can avoid the other. Despite the blurry boundaries surrounding quantity and quality the philosophical differences between both paradigms are marked, and speak of different approaches to and understandings of the world that have very real benefits and limitations. When buying a new home, for example, using a quantitative paradigm would involve consulting a map of the area in which the home is located to get a broad idea of its distance to other important locations, and calculating and/or reviewing any statistics on income, cost of property, crime, education or taxes in comparison to other neighborhoods. If instead I decided to walk and observe the neighborhood, seeking a lived-experience sense of it, as well as asking questions along the way to residents/neighbors about their experiences while living there, then I would be clearly working from a qualitative paradigm.

Although in the process of purchasing a new home it would be advisable to use both approaches, in the world of research -where using both approaches at once is often not realistic given the time and resources available- a decision to use primarily a qualitative or a quantitative paradigm is usually determined by a wide number of factors. Most important and determinant amongst these is the research question itself, even if in practice other factors prior to the formulation of the research question (specific field and training of the researcher, object of study, prior research on the topic, researcher concerns surrounding funding, tenure, publications, departmental politics, etc.) are just as influential in the decision to use one paradigm or the other. In my case –and prior to

formulating the research question— I had a strong preference for using qualitative methods thanks to extensive graduate training in qualitative methodology, strong faculty and departmental support, and a philosophical bias that places a high value on human experience and the meanings attached to it, both of which have been traditionally explored with qualitative methods. Although all of these factors by themselves tilted the balance towards using qualitative methodology, it is also true that as I began to research responsible fatherhood I was appalled by the limited number of qualitative studies that gave voice to black fathers given the extensive treatment they received in statistical/quantitative studies, as well as in other popular media and political discussions about policy. This perceived weakness in the research literature spoke to me of a need for a qualitative study that added a lived understanding to the literature of issues related to responsible fatherhood and race. Finally, and although this study could have theoretically been conceptualized several ways, at its core it is primarily exploratory, —that is, it does not seek to test hypotheses, a traditionally quantitative endeavor. Specifically, this study seeks to explore how black men who have made responsible fatherhood an important part of their social identity understand the term, and how (if in any way) these men position themselves within some of the dominant social representations on race and gender in United States fatherhood politics. The main guiding research question, and the layers underneath it that I’m exploring, point to questions about personal meanings and experiences that are therefore best explored using qualitative methodology.

### ***The Narrative and Feminist Inquiry Traditions***

Unlike quantitative methodology —a relatively stable methodological field— qualitative inquiry has become extremely diverse, multiplying exponentially over time to



include a wide array of methods that often reflect very different ontologies and epistemologies. Amongst this wide array of qualitative repertoires, this project is most clearly situated within the constructivist and feminist traditions. I briefly explore both of these traditions; the reasoning for adopting them in this study and some of the positive and negative consequences of bringing them to bear on issues surrounding race, gender, and responsible fatherhood in the United States.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) outline eight historical pivotal moments in the qualitative research field. Of these, the eighth and most recent moment

...confronts the methodological backlash associated with the evidence-based social movement. It is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities. The eighth moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and communities (p. 3)

Politically, the present study attempts to live up to the themes highlighted above. It is both a reaction to and provides a different lens (subjective, discursive, experiential) with which to view the often-quoted evidence-based literature on black fatherhood. It reflects a concern with both the variety of social representations populating fatherhood politics in the United States, as well as with their implications for individuals and communities. Finally it attempts to take part in a critical conversation about race and gender in fatherhood and family studies. Nevertheless, and although I am arguing that this study is politically and motivationally squarely located within the eighth moment, in terms of methodology its roots go further back. As a study borrowing mainly from the constructivist and feminist traditions, its roots are more easily traced to what has been

termed the "crisis of representation" beginning in the social sciences in the 1980s, and the effort since that time to increase reflexivity in research while making issues of gender, class, and race sites of critical debate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The constructivist paradigm -out of which narrative inquiry develops— "assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). Within the constructivist paradigm this study is most clearly situated in the contextual constructionist tradition (as opposed to the more radical or strict constructionism). Contextual constructionism provides a gradation to the constructivist vs. realist view: it does not go as far as strict constructionism in questioning any social reality outside of discourse, nor does it assert a social reality that is objective, quantifiable and independent of the observer as realism does. Instead contextual constructionism acknowledges that there is a social reality (e.g., absent fathers), but states it is impossible to separate it from the observer and context in which it is observed, making attempts at empirical objectivity impossible and politically problematic. Contextual constructionism seeks, as an alternative, to evaluate and situate claims made about social reality in their socio-historical context, questioning along the way claim-makers' assertions, motivations, and investments in those claims. A commitment to contextual constructionism –and the implied ontological relativism within it– has some important positional consequences for the researcher that influence, a priori, the interpretation of participants' narratives. While I am, for example, seeking to explore and validate participant's narratives (and the social representations within them) in the

context in which they are produced, I am also simultaneously questioning those understandings within them that are expressed as universal, trans-historical, or essential. This parallel process reveals two well-known and connected dilemmas within narrative research, the first one regarding what counts as truth, and the second one regarding the researcher's voice, his/her interpretive authority and his/her power of representation over the participants (Chase, 2005). I have already addressed the issue of truth in my discussion in regard to difference, arguing for a model of truth that moves away from an idea of "finding" to one of "producing" truth, where what is sought is a narrative that makes sense given the multiple contexts within which its embedded, and not one of exact correspondence to an external objective reality. On the other hand, and although there is not a completely clean solution to the researcher-researched power difference, I have attempted to adopt in this project what Chase (2005) calls the "Researcher's Interactive Voice," which seeks to examine researcher's voices "their subject positions, social locations, interpretations and personal experiences through the refracted medium of narrator's voices" (p. 666). The purpose of this interactive-reflexive voice is ultimately to make the researcher fully accountable to readers and participants.

The value of the relativist ontology implied in contextual constructionism does not lie merely in the unsettling of dominant social representations. A relativist ontology can potentially provide those who have been subjected to those representations the freedom to accept them (or not) based on their own experience, choices, understandings, and perceived consequences, and not on their dominant status. Additionally, in seeing participant's narratives as co-constructed I embrace a subjective epistemology. Doing so reveals my role as co-creator of the narrative -pushing me to make my motives and

choices transparent and to highlight the ways in which my participants (in this case black fathers) are “constantly engaged in a process of negotiating the connection between their personal narratives and dominant societal narratives” (Murray 2003, p. 99). Finally, a subjective epistemology opens the door to creating new meanings through narrative, meanings that better fit participants’ experiences, that increase their choices, and that possibly, and perhaps most importantly, pave the road to conceptualizing a better future for them and for those around them.

Narrative inquiry involves an “amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). The value of narrative here, however, lies not in providing access to biographical particulars as *truth datum*, but in its nature as a meaning-making activity and performance (always limited and enabled by social, cultural, and contextual circumstances) that incorporates personal experience, conceptions about the self, and social/cultural expectations and discourses, all within personal stories. The structure a story provides is important. Davies and Harre (1990) argue that the “conceptions people have about themselves are disjointed unless they are located in a story” (p. 270). Their statement hints at the role that narrative structure plays not only in the organization of personal experience, but in the construction and negotiation of identity. Murray (2003) also points to this key identity-formation aspect of narrative:

Narrative not only brings order and meaning to our everyday life but, reflexively, it also provides structure to our very sense of selfhood. We tell stories about our lives to ourselves and to others. As such, we create a narrative identity (p. 115)

The formation of identity that occurs through narrative requires drawing from and integrating cultural and social plot lines -along with personal ones- to form a coherent “self-in-the-world” story, one that is a response to the context in which it was elicited. Although this identity formation is fluid and unlikely to remain completely the same in a different context and/or time, the meanings as formulated, the social representations drawn from, the specific stories told, and the emotions displayed are meaningful given the specific participant, the specific context, and the specific time.

This study, besides drawing heavily from the narrative tradition, draws for its method of analysis from the qualitative feminist tradition (see below under Data Analysis Procedures). Although a full description of the present study’s method of analysis is given below, a reflexive account of the reasoning behind this choice is outlined here. This will help shed some light in regard to my positionality as a researcher, as well as on some of the theoretical commitments that influence the conceptualization of this study and the interpretation of participants’ narratives.

Common to all research approaches using a feminist paradigm is the belief that the world makes material difference along gender lines. Despite this basic unifying thread, feminist inquiry is noted for being a widely diverse and quickly changing field, having managed to remain at the forefront of some of the most important debates having to do with gender, class or race within qualitative research in the last thirty years (Olesen, 2005). Although this “vanguard” theoretical nature of feminism is enough to include it in most theoretical and methodological discussions on difference or inequality, the use of a feminist-narrative method of analysis here is guided by two primary researcher concerns, as described below.

The first concern has to do with my own personal and political positionality coming into this study, and how these located me in an area of conflict when researching fatherhood and responsibility. Although personally and politically I believe myself to be clearly aligned with feminist objectives of gender equality and justice –an alignment I try to live up to daily in my own family life– my investment on researching fatherhood and responsibility led me into an area dominated by patriarchal interests, where my condition as a male and a father implied *ipso facto* a political alliance with them. One of my first challenges therefore was finding, within existing conceptualizations of responsible fatherhood, a space that allowed for the belief that responsible fatherhood -as committed to gender equality and justice- is an important part of any feminist project (and, *vice versa*, that insights from feminism should be key in the conceptualization of any ethical vision of responsible fatherhood). I was able to find that space with the help of writers such as bell hooks (2003, 2004) or Anthony Neal (2005), both of whom describe a need for, and provide, ethical and responsible models of masculinity and fatherhood inspired by broad feminist ideals. Along the same lines, I was also hoping to incorporate concretely and methodologically a stronger feminist element within this project as a way to introduce a different lens with which to view and frame what was quickly shaping up to be a conversation between men about men. The Listening Guide (Gilligan 2003) a narrative feminist qualitative method of inquiry.

The second concern has to do with the way in which I conceptualize participants in this study, and for which I have ultimately relied heavily on feminist-narrative discussions of subjectivity and agency. When I began thinking of this project I was interested in exploring responsible fatherhood meanings and tracing social

representations related to race and gender in my participants' narratives. In doing so, however, it became evident I was also unintentionally leaning towards a conceptualization of participants as passive vehicles of social representations, and not as active agents involved in the process of re-presentation. Beyond the help of Social Representations Theory in helping me clarify my ideas on social representation (see "Theoretical Frame"), it was through theoretical discussions on agency and subjectivity within philosophical theory -discussions that feminism has played a key role in shaping over the last twenty years (see, for example, Harding (1992), Benhabib, Butler, et al. (1995), Butler, (2006), McNay (2000)) that I was able to clarify my conceptualization of subjectivity for this study. Specifically, with the rise of postmodern understandings of the subject as fractured, multiple, and structured by discourse (as opposed to the unified, self-contained, in-control individual promoted by modern Western capitalist understandings of the self) there has been an ongoing theoretical debate within feminist qualitative research on whether there is a subject to be known, what can we know of it if there is one, and whether there is space for agency or intentionality within subjectivity (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). This debate carries important consequences for research, in that much of qualitative studies have traditionally assumed that one can have access to some version of a true/real self through interviews, ultimately positing the existence of an intentional subject who is accessible through language, leading to what Hollway and Jefferson (as quoted in Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), call the "transparent account" or "transparent self" problem.

In their 2008 article *What can be Known and How: Narrated Subjects and the Listening Guide*, Doucet and Mauthner posit the "narrated subject" as a possible way to

breach the structured vs. critical debate on subjectivity, offering also The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al. 2003) as a method through which to specifically access the narrated subject in research. In this article Doucet and Mauthner argue that although there may be a “deep subjectivity” beyond/behind a narrative account, it is impossible to access it or know it completely -similar, in a way, to contextual constructionism’s vision of social reality. Instead, they argue, “all we can know is what is narrated by subjects, as well as our interpretation of their stories within the wider web of social and structural relations from which narrated subjects speak” (p. 405) For their vision of a narrated subject Doucet and Mauthner lean on Seyla Benhabib’s feminist-narrative model of the subject, as one who is in constant relation with others, the structures, and the culture within which it is embedded:

This is an important point because it underlines a view of narrated subjects who are not constituted in language or discourse, but are constituted in relation to other subjects and to the material reality of everyday life. (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:403)

Benhabib vision of subjectivity fits well with Critical Social Representations Theory, as they both argue for a dialogical view of the subject in relation to the networks of meanings (i.e. social representations) within which the self is situated. In the case of Benhabib’s subject, it is in narrative that we can perceive both subjectivity and agency - in relation to the immediate context in which the narrative is produced, as well as to the wider set of personal, structural and cultural contexts within which the narrator is situated. This conceptualization allows for a vision of subjectivity not as a reified entity “out there,” or a post-modern side-effect of discourse, but as an ongoing changing



relationship to the multiple contexts within which the subject is embedded and inseparable from, and that appears constructed-for and -relatively, momentarily- fixed within narratives.

The Listening Guide (Gilligan 2003), a narrative-feminist interpretive method, provides one way to concretely attempt to capture this relational nature of the subject in a text (see below under “Method of Analysis”). This is done by conducting successive listenings/readings of the same narrative. The Listening Guide is designed to help the researcher break away from unitary, self-contained conceptions of the individual. The result is a version of identity that borrows from the fractured subject of post-modernism while maintaining the participant’s agency as seen in narrative through the dynamic relational negotiation of the subject with the socio-historical, personal, and cultural context in which he is embedded.

### ***The interview***

The older and most common methods of collecting data in the history of qualitative research have been natural observation and interviewing. Interviews particularly have become an intrinsic aspect of modern western societies, where they are used in a wide number of ways (through questionnaires, online chat rooms, applications, etc.) and in a variety of settings (in talk shows, college admissions, police investigations, etc.) to collect all sorts of data, in most cases unrelated to social science research (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Because of this growing predominance of interviewing in our society, Atkinson and Silverman, (1997) have stated that the United States is “the interview society,” and Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 1) have called interviewing the “universal mode of systematic inquiry.” The social preponderance of interviewing speaks

to its broad definitional scope as a term, while the variety of uses and contexts in which interviews are used reflect, ultimately, different assumptions about the process itself, the data sought, the interviewee and, of course, the interviewer himself. Given my reliance on interviewing as a data collection method to gather the narratives for this study, I explore briefly below the specific way in which interviewing is used in this study, the reasons and choices for using the specific type of interviewing, and the assumptions made in the process.

Within social science research, interviews have generally been classified broadly as structured and unstructured, with structured interviewing being the most formal, standardized and procedurally inflexible of the two forms, used primarily to collect very specific information according to pre-determined research categories. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, offer more procedural flexibility and can adopt a number of shapes, from semi-structured (where a script with predetermined criteria is loosely followed but the respondents are allowed freedom to explore other areas as needed), to completely unstructured (such as in creative interviewing, where “how to” rules of interviewing are completely abandoned in favor of in-the-moment adaptation to the interview context). Unstructured interviews are typically used when the goal is to understand a phenomena/experience as the subject of the interview understands it, without imposing strict predetermined categories to limit the field of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The research questions within this study call for this type of interviewing, as they require that the participants have flexibility in being able to explore understandings of responsible fatherhood and race without imposing pre-determined research categories. On the other hand, however, the intent to explore pre-identified themes in-depth if these

come up within participant's answers speaks to a loose response-dependent interview script, indicating a semi-structured interview process.

Although the main research question calls for the exploration of meanings on responsible fatherhood and race, the follow-up questions are constructed to elicit narratives -always in response to the content provided by participants- about the process by which participants arrived to those understandings (e. g., "You mentioned ... -How did you come to that understanding?"). This move, from exploring specific meanings to tracing the process by which participants appropriate those meanings, speaks to the narrative research paradigm adopted in this study (and already explored above). Unsurprisingly, the common way to obtain data in most narrative research paradigms is through interviews, which in their narrative form give "the research participant much more central control in shaping the agenda." (Murray, 2003 p. 101) This is true also here, where participants are encouraged to make sense of their commitment to and understandings of responsible fatherhood in narrative without much additional structure being given during the interview.

Fontana and Frey (2005) have highlighted how new trends in interviewing are the result of

...a growing realization that interviews are not the mythical neutral tools envisioned by survey research. Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in an interaction with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place (p. 719)

This realization has led primarily to two main core changes within interviewing in

the social sciences. On the one hand, there has been a push to increase researcher reflexivity so as to highlight the ways in which both interviewer and interviewee co-create the interview, an increase in reflexive focus from what is accomplished in the interview to how it is accomplished, “thereby uncovering the ways in which we go about creating a text” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 697). On the other hand, and as a side effect of the push to abandon the assumption of interviewer neutrality, there has been a move towards more empathetic forms of interviewing that “take an ethical stance in favor of the individual or group being studied.” (p. 696) This move towards empathetic forms of interviewing has ranged from mere attempts to turn interviews into more equal dialogical conversations (where the interviewer shares his own experiences, feelings etc. in equal manner with the interviewee), to approaches focusing more on democratic, participatory practices, (where advocacy for the interviewee’s plight is an aspect deeply intertwined with the purpose of conducting the interview, and where every aspect of the process is open to the participant’s input).

The focus on reflexivity as part of the interview has been incorporated here in the method of analysis, where researcher reflexivity is an intrinsic part of the analytic process. Reflexivity here is introduced to highlight how each interview was accomplished as well as to provide transparency in regards to my involvement in the interviewing process and my reactions to the text. The move towards empathetic forms of interviewing is also present within this study, although less overtly so. As stated above, this study is motivated by a concern with the variety and conflicting nature of the social representations populating fatherhood politics within the United States. This motivation speaks to two additional concerns, one with the consistently reported alarming statistics

surrounding father absence within black communities in the United States, and two, with the way these statistics are used to promote specific narrow and discriminatory visions of race, gender, and family formations and values. Although these concerns inform the research, as a researcher I try to adopt a less overt political stance in the actual process of collecting interviews, where the leading interview question and following response-dependent inquiries are designed to limit the influence of the researcher in the narratives offered by the respondents. The idea here is not to improve access to a more “real” participant as has been done in traditional approaches to interviewing (and which is also the motivation in many newer empathic approaches), but to allow the interviewees to construct and create meanings in narrative with the least possible structural imposition from the interviewer. Brinkman (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) states that a central discussion within interviewing practices

concerns the issue of whether interviews can provide a more or less direct pipeline to the participants’ life-worlds provided that the interviewer engages in non-directional unbiased questioning. Some researchers question this idea and argue that interviews are active meaning-making practices that produce, rather than uncover, antecedent meaning elements (p. 472)

In regard to this discussion, then, I can be said to be taking here a perhaps unusual approach to interviewing. Theoretical commitments within this study point to a vision of interviewing as an active meaning-making practice, a creative endeavor in which both interviewer and interviewee participate. Despite this theoretical commitment, I also argue that the effort to trace social representations on responsibility, race, and fatherhood in participants’ narratives requires limiting as much as possible the influence of the

interviewer in order to increase interviewee flexibility/freedom when drawing from different social representations in narrative. The argument, therefore, is not for interviewing as a pipeline to a participant's life-world, but for interviewing as a pipeline to *how* the life-world may have been constructed at the time of the interview.

Nonetheless, and even though I am arguing for a restrained interviewer role, "nondirectional unbiased questioning" is also seen here as impossible given the numerous signifiers already brought into play by the time the interview begins. Because of this, the reflexive component is introduced to attempt to shed more light on how the interview process unfolded. This is not an attempt to increase control (as may be understood in quantitative approaches) over influencing variables at the time of interpreting the text, but as an attempt to increase procedural transparency while acknowledging that full transparency can never be fully achieved, and represents ultimately merely a brief interpretive pause in the process of interpretation.

## **Selection of Site**

### **Description of site.**

Over the last three years I have actively volunteered in a program designed to increase the involvement of fathers and significant male figures on the lives of 3-5 year old children attending Pittsburgh Public Schools. This program serves as the recruitment site for this study. The Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Education Programs Male/Fatherhood Involvement Program (PPSMFIP from here on) is an early intervention program within Pittsburgh Public Schools that seeks, according to its literature posted online, to:

...actively involve and engage Early Childhood Education Programs' fathers and

significant male figures increasing their participation in the social and educational development of Early Childhood Education Programs children. To create a positive pathway for fathers and significant males to become more involved parents and reinforce their roles as fathers, husbands, partners, grandfathers, uncles and community leaders (retrieved from program flyer)

### **Rationale and access**

The research questions and conceptualization of this study required that participants have given considerable thought to, and be committed to ideas concerning responsible fatherhood *prior to* their recruitment into the study. With this requirement as a background, involvement in a RF program became a way to theoretically and safely assume that participants were committed to and had dedicated some thought to issues on responsibility and fatherhood before being recruited into this study. Given my interest specifically in black fathers, the RF program in question would have to also either work specifically with black fathers, or at the very least with a diverse population including black fathers that I could recruit later on if my burgeoning interest on issues related to race, responsibility and fatherhood at the time developed into a feasible study. The Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Education Programs Male/Fatherhood Involvement Program, an RF program working primarily with inner city Pittsburgh culturally diverse fathers, became, given the requirements above, a prime candidate as a recruitment site for this study.

When I began thinking of this study, however, there were other programs within the city of Pittsburgh emphasizing responsible fatherhood, a few of which I researched, exchanged e-mails with and/or visited. The choice of PPSMFIP over the other programs,

though, was not based on an extensive comparison between them, or on the merit of the specific philosophical orientation or active work of the programs themselves, but was the outcome of the value I gave to my experiences in interacting with them. At the time in which I became involved with PPSMFIP my study was in the very early conceptualization stages, and my interest in RF programs was primarily both personal (driven by my interest on issues on race, responsibility and fatherhood), and exploratory (seeking to find out how RF programs worked, what activities they engaged in daily, etc.) Within the context of these interests (and once the program requirements outlined above had been met) my personal experience in my interaction with each program guided my choice of a program to work with. PPSMFIP were the most prompt in their e-mail/call returns, friendly in their interactions with me, and open to my presence during their regular meetings, all factors that tilted the balance towards increasing my regular interaction with the program and having it become the site for this study.

Although within meetings I was initially always introduced as a graduate student interested in conducting research with participants of the PPSMFIP, my condition at the time as a father of a 3-5 year-old boy and my personal interest in issues of responsible fatherhood meant that I quickly became more of a volunteer than simply an observer/researcher. Over my three years of involvement with the program prior to conducting interviews, I increasingly participated in PPSMFIP events, donating time only first, but then also resources (primarily a DJ speaker system I own which has been used to play music at several PPSMFIP events, but also a car when transportation of materials between sites was needed). I feel it is important ethically therefore to point out here that my increased volunteer involvement with the program was not motivated merely by my



interest in conducting research with them, but by my sympathy with their efforts, by my personal belief that positive father involvement in the life of children is important and necessary, and by my increasing friendship over that time with many of the program's participants. No data were collected and no interviews were conducted during this time, and there was no deception involved –that is, I consistently mentioned my interest in conducting research with PPSMFIP participants in the future.

### **Selection of Sample**

#### **Size and characteristics.**

Four adult men (ages 30, 31, 50 and 59) participating in the PPSMFIP were recruited to participate in the study. The only inclusionary criteria was a personal identification with the label “black” as a racial category, and involvement in the program, as defined by attendance at monthly meetings and participation in PPSMFIP organized activities. It is important to point out here that being a “responsible” father (however responsibility is defined) in one's personal life, or even being a father for that matter, were not requirements for participating in this study, as it is the commitment to responsible fatherhood as an idea that was important here, even if that idea was not personally followed in one's private life, or represents merely an ideal.

#### **Recruitment and Informed Consent Procedures.**

Participants were recruited from attendants to the PPSMFIC through convenience sampling. The actual recruitment took place through: 1) announcements made before group meetings (see appendix E) combined with the use of a sign-up sheet for contact purposes (see appendix F). Prior to participating in this study, participants were asked to provide informed consent (see appendix G). As stated in this form, participants were able

to withdraw from the study at any point with no consequences to them, and with the possibility of requesting the destruction of all interview records with their withdrawal.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix H).

Interviews took place in locations chosen by mutual agreement. They were audio recorded for transcription and took on average between 1 and 2 hours to complete, with the shortest interview lasting fifty minutes and the longest two hours and a half.

Participants were asked to provide informed consent prior to beginning the interview. Once the interview began, an initial statement (e.g. “I’d like you to speak about RF.”) was designed to clarify the focus of the interview. The question that followed (“What does RF mean to you as a black father?”) was designed to get at the specific meanings attached to RF while limiting the field of inquiry to the participant’s experience as a black father. Finally, the following “how?” question (“How did you come to that understanding?”) attempted to tap into narrative by asking about the specific process by which participants arrived to their understandings.

From then on the interview became primarily response-dependent, that is, follow-up questions were dependent on the narrative of the participant and the main themes he touched on. The focus of this part of the interview was to get to some of the underlying assumptions within participants’ narratives on fatherhood, responsibility and race and to attempt to delve into the process by which the participant arrived to those understandings. Active and reflective listening was used to help identify understandings in narrative and reflect them back without distortion to participants. “How?” questions were used to delve

deeper and put into narrative the process by which participants' incorporated those assumptions. In this way, for example, a narrative that emphasized the role of the father as a family protector elicited a reflective/clarifying statement (e.g. "You said/mentioned/implied/stated that the role of a father is to protect his family...") and a question designed to get to the process by which he adopted that assumption (How did you come to that understanding?)

A guiding structure including a number of themes likely to be in any narrative at the intersection of fatherhood, responsibility and race is included in the interview guide. This list was not exclusive and was created to help me as the interviewer to orient myself during the interview, as well as follow assumptions expressed in narrative if they seem important even though they may not have been identified within the guide. The guiding structure taps into important themes that are the center of most of the debates within the RF field, particularly as they relate to race and gender. In this way I am seeking to trace the influence of social representations on responsibility, fatherhood, gender and race, and clarify the positions that participants are taking in regard to them.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

#### **Data for study.**

The data for the study were the interview transcripts.

#### **Protection of participants and third parties**

Audio recordings of interviews will be kept under password in the researcher's laptop hard drive until two years from date of dissertation defense, after which they will be erased. Additionally, all identifying information was omitted from the written accounts, where pseudonyms for names, locations, etc. were used for protection,

organization, and reading-ease purposes. A list matching names and pseudonyms and all signed consent forms will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's home until two years after the completion of the study, when they will be shredded.

### **Method of analysis: The Listening Guide**

#### ***Rationale and literature review***

In this study I draw from and apply theoretical insights from Critical Social Representations Theory, and I situate myself methodologically within narrative and feminist paradigms. I utilize interviewing as the main data collection method, and a variation of The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003, Doucet & Mauthner, 2008) for analyzing narratives collected through interviews. I introduce and describe here the rationale for using The Listening Guide (TLG) and provide a brief literature review describing some of its uses in other studies. Finally, I outline the way in which it is used in the context of this study.

The Listening Guide was born out of the theoretical and practical work conducted by Carol Gilligan during the 1980s on identity and moral development (Gilligan et al. 2003), which became also the basis of her well-known feminist criticism of and opposition to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Gilligan 1982). Gilligan has said that the development of TLG was the result of a ten year collaborative effort between her and her graduate students, an effort that sought to illuminate "the complex and multilayered nature of the expression of human experience and the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 169). As a narrative-feminist multi-vocal qualitative method, TLG pays attention to meaning-making processes within narrative, and draws specifically on ideas of "voice,"

“resonance,” and “relationship.” It comprises

...a series of sequential listenings, each designed to bring the researcher into relationship with a person’s distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person’s expression of her or his experience within a particular relational context (Gilligan et al. 2003, p. 159)

It is TLG’s attention to both the multiple relational contexts in which human beings are embedded, as well as to the many voices that compose and shape a narrative account that make it particularly useful in this project. The Listening Guide provides a step-by-step approach to reading narratives that breaks away from modern/western individualistic visions of the self as bounded, masterful, and rational -a vision deeply intertwined with a patriarchal motifs and ideals. Instead, it offers an alternative conceptualization of the subject –one drawing heavily from the relational feminism of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century– as inherently relational and inseparable from the context/s within which it is embedded. The Listening Guide assumes that “our sense of self is inextricable from our relationships with others and with the cultures within which we live” (Gilligan et al. 2003, p. 157). Because of its relational view of the subject, TLG fits well with theoretical commitments in this study that attempt to complicate dominant narrow and simplistic societal representations of black fathers. In bringing it to bear as a method for issues of responsible fatherhood, race, and gender, I attempt to introduce a feminist theoretical lens with which to view a field heavily influenced by white patriarchal interests. In fact, Gilligan’s challenge of Kohlberg’s theory of Moral Development in the early 1980s introduced a feminist-inspired view of ethics, the ethics of care (see Held 2005, Slote, 2007), which helped to inform the development of TLG as a method. The

ethics of care offers a situated, relational alternative to the socially predominant views of ethics and moral theory and development, views that have traditionally conceptualized ethics and justice within abstract, objective and universal sets of values.

In practice, TLG seeks to reveal the multiple voices that speak through and are spoken to within any single narrative, and achieves a vision of the subject as fragmented and multi-determined without falling into the postmodern trap of removing agency as an unintended collateral. Additionally, TLG includes as part of its process a researcher's reflexive "listening" to the narratives. This reflexive component contextualizes the narrative further and attempts to tap into the relationship between the participant and the researcher (as seen through the eyes of the researcher), highlighting his/her personal reaction-to and reading-of the narrative. Finally, TLG offers the potential flexibility to incorporate different insights and analytical procedures from other theories into its "listening" while also providing a strong step-by-step interpretive structure within which to work with any text or narrative.

Despite being a relatively new method in the landscape of qualitative research, TLG has been used with different populations in a wide variety of contexts, from United States adolescent girls (Brown, 1997; Woodcock, 2005) and boys (Way, 1997), to nursing unit managers in Australia (Paliadelis & Cruikshank, 2008), teenage students in Ireland (Byrne, Canavan & Millar, 2009), mothers in England (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998) and childless women in Bulgaria (Todorova & Kotzeva, 2003). Gilligan et al. (2003, p. 169) argue that TLG "is a particularly useful tool for discovery research; to uncover new questions to pursue through focusing in on and learning from individual experiences." It was initially conceptualized as involving four sequential readings or

“listenings.” Given what the method calls for, Gilligan argues “listening” is a more accurate descriptor than “reading,” but I will use both here interchangeably as I believe they each tap into an important aspect -metaphorical and practical, respectively- of what is actually taking place in the analysis. In Gilligan’s conceptualization, the first two listenings required initial reflexive listening for the plot, and then a second listening for the “I” who is speaking in the text. The last two readings in Gilligan’s original version of TLG offered more flexibility, requiring listenings for two or more “contrapuntual” voices, which, borrowing from the musical theory idea of melodic counterpoint, represent an attempt to hear other voices present in the text and perhaps not completely in line with the general plot. Doucet and Mauthner (2008) offer a variation of Gilligan’s initial vision of TLG which changes some aspects and introduces more detailed methodological procedures to the analysis. It is their vision that serves as the guide for the narrative analysis for this study. I have made several changes to the overall structure –detailed below– to adapt to the research questions in this study.

***The first reading: guided and reflexive***

The first listening in Doucet and Mauthner’s (2008) vision involved two parts: 1) a listening for the plot of the narrative, and 2) a researcher’s reflexive response to the interview. Doucet and Mauthner do not make a specific argument for conducting the listening-reflexive response sequence in that specific order. In this study I actually opted for conducting the reflexive reading first so as to lay down my own reactions to the text, the interviewees and the interview situation prior to conducting any other type of analysis. The reflexive reading seeks to explore the listener’s reactions to the narrative and to the narrator himself -including associations, thoughts, feelings, and memories- as

evoked in the interview and follow-up reading. The focus of this reading is to bring the listener into relation with the narrator allowing readers to understand the ways in which the listener's personhood impacted the study at both an intersubjective level during the interview, and at an interpretive level after, exposing the ways in which the subjectivity of the researcher colored the lens with which he read the narrative. At a meta-level, this section included my understanding/interpretation of my own reactions to both the interview and the narrative. At a practical level, Doucet and Mauthner (2008) recommend for this step tracing a dividing line through each page, keeping the narrative to the left and providing, to the right, the researcher's reactions to the narrative as he listens/reads, a recommendation I have followed here (see Appendixes A, B, C, D).

In regard to the listening for the plot Doucet and Mauthner (2008) report conducting this listening with the classical grounded theory question "What is happening here?" in mind. Although this allows them to approach the narrative in an inductive way, remaining completely open to the text, it did not make as much sense within the context of this study, which is guided by a very specific focus. Given how my first research question ("How do black men that have made of responsible fatherhood an important part of their identity understand the term?) is key in laying the ground for the rest of the study, I changed this listening from "grounded" to "guided," that is, guided by the question "What are the understandings of responsible fatherhood elicited in the narrative?" This allowed for a much more focused listening that sought to unravel understandings of fatherhood and responsibility and the implications of those understandings.

***The second reading: narrated and relational***

The second reading or listening merges aspects of Doucet and Mauthner's (2008)



second listening (for the “narrated subject”) and third listening (for the “relational subject”) into one single step divided in two sections. This is done to help answer the second research questions of this study, which seeks to understand the process by which participants arrived to their understandings of responsibility and fatherhood (“How have they come to their understandings?”). In the context of this study, both the narrated and relational subjects speak to *how* participants came to understand responsible fatherhood in the way in which they did, and therefore help to answer the same question. I have therefore merged them both to keep organizational coherence in relation to the research questions of the study.

The first part, therefore, involved listening for the most important narratives and themes that helped participants understand responsible fatherhood the way they do. Here I focused on the main stories –sometimes nicely organized, sometimes threaded throughout the interview– that seemed to have the most impact in the participants overall understandings of responsible fatherhood. Listening for the narrated subject in this way, in relation to, and in the context of, stories about the self, helps illuminate the process, how participants’ lived experiences have impacted their own understandings.

The second part involved listening for the intersubjective world of participants in the stories above, to how the voices of others influence their understandings. It is, therefore, a listening for “social networks, and close and intimate relations. It is informed by feminist theoretical critiques of individualist conceptions of agency, and their replacement with relational concepts of subjects” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). At a practical level, I have sought here to identify in the stories above the ways in which participants speak about the main actors and networks of social relations within which

they are situated, and how these seem to speak through them. I conceptualized this listening as a way to tap specifically into the ways in which participant's relationships to their parents, children and emotionally significant others are constructed in narrative, the roles they are seen to have in their lives and how much of a factor they are in participant's construction of concepts and ideas surrounding race, responsibility and fatherhood.

### ***The third reading: positions on race and gender***

This last listening seeks to address the last research question (How do participants position themselves in regards to social representations at the intersection of fatherhood, responsibility, gender and race?). It seeks to situate participants' narratives within national fatherhood politics by attending to the ways in which participants position themselves in regards to social representations of race and gender. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which social representations frame or are taken for granted within narrative (e.g. an idealized narrative assuming the man as a breadwinner and the woman as homemaker) versus the ways in which social representations are explicitly embraced, negotiated or rejected, reflecting specific intentionally adopted positions (e.g. "I think men are better fit to be breadwinners, whereas women have evolved to perform house and child care duties.")

### **Research Quality and Rigor**

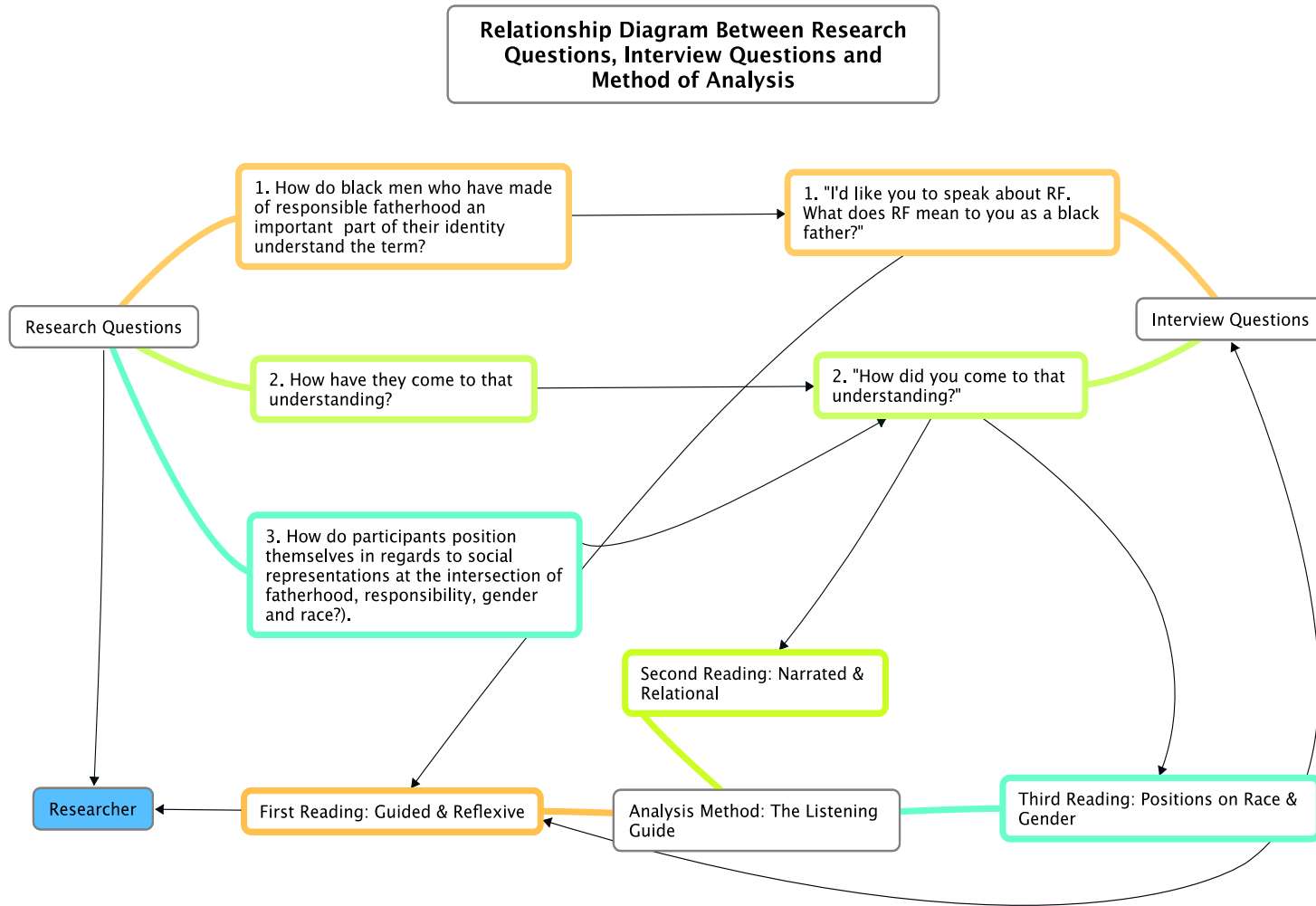
In Table 1 I introduce five assessment criteria as a guide towards helping determine the research quality and rigor of this study. The table also indicates the locations where each of these criteria is addressed within this document. Criteria are drawn from the various criteria offered in Eisenhart and Howe (1992) and Creswell and

Miller (2000). Creswell and Miller recommend using at least two verification procedures in any one single study. Five are presented here.

**Table 1:** *Validity/verification assessment criteria*

| <i>Assessment Criteria</i>                           | <i>Location</i>  |
|--|--|
| Awareness of prior knowledge                         | Literature review (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5)                        |
| Prolonged engagement/observation                     | Prolonged engagement/volunteering with PPSMFIP (see chapter 3) |
| Clarification of researcher bias                     | Reflexivity (see Chapter 3, 4, 5)                              |
| Fit between research questions & interview questions | See Figure 1 (also Chapter 3)                                  |
| Limitations  | Chapter 5  |

Figure 1



## Chapter IV: Findings

### Bertrand

#### Introduction

Bertrand's interview was the first of the four interviews conducted for this study. He was, at the time of the interview, 30 years-old and a Family Service Specialist for Pittsburgh Public Schools. He had been married for five years, but had only in the last year become the proud father of a boy, his first and only child. His wife worked as a teacher, also for Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Bertrand was one of the most approachable individuals in the group. Young, friendly, and always open to conversation, he and I had talked casually several times before about race, racism, fatherhood, and several other topics before and/or after group meetings and events. His candid, engaging demeanor and his willingness and openness to explore any topic made him a perfect candidate for a first interview. The interview itself was conducted at a park in the Squirrel Hill area of Pittsburgh on a sunny fall morning, while sitting at some empty bleachers. It lasted over an hour, and took place without any major disruptions.

#### Reflexive reading summary<sup>2</sup>

The reflexive reading of Bertrand's interview reveals some of the similarities and differences between us, and the possible impact these had on my assumptions about him and on the interpretation of the interview. As stated before, Bertrand and I had casually spoken about some of the themes related to this study during meetings and group events.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for full reflexive reading of Bertrand's interview

Although we had never discussed them in as much depth as we would during the interview, my assumption prior to meeting with him was that out of the five fathers interviewed for this study I would probably find myself agreeing the most with Bertrand.

The interview and the reflexive reading revealed that although Bertrand and I shared similar positions on a number of the issues discussed, there were also important differences between us. There were many points of convergence and divergence between us (as can be expected between any two individuals), but for the purpose of this summary I will highlight below only those that likely impacted my ability (one way or the other) to connect and empathize with Bertrand. These have to do primarily with the broad language used and values endorsed to speak of fatherhood, and, also, with our positions on gender and gender difference.

Fatherhood for me has, since the birth of my first son, been an emotionally charged topic. As a result, the language I use to speak of fatherhood is often reflective of that, pulling on personal examples of the love for my children to construct other arguments about the importance of caring fathers, ethics, mentorship, and so on. For me, it all begins with a deep connection with my children, and takes off from there. In this regard, and although Bertrand and I reached similar conclusions on several topics related to fatherhood, it felt at times like we took different roads to get there. Bertrand's language about fatherhood was primarily centered on values and morality, and pulled very little from any type of emotional connection with his child (which is not to say he didn't have one, but simply that it did not seem to him to have shaped his larger views on fatherhood). Being a present, ethical and responsible father seemed to be the result of the moral obligations and responsibilities tied to fatherhood, in a similar way that being a

good husband is part of the moral obligations seen as tied to being a husband. This difference between us posed an interesting challenge during and after the interview, as even in instances in which I may have agreed on the substance of what Bertrand said (for example, not being promiscuous or engaging in illegal activities such as selling drugs) I struggled emotionally to connect with what was said. It took me some time to realize this was because of the different language used, language reflecting different values and a different path to a similar position (in the example before, Bertrand states it is important to not engage in those activities so as not to shame his, his wife's, and his child's names, as opposed to, for example, because he loves them or so as not to hurt them or cause them pain). On the other hand, the times during the interview in which I was able to connect most with Bertrand was when he relied on emotions or on a sense of deep interpersonal connection to explain his positions. Bertrand, for example, spoke of how important it was for him to be present, to have "leisure" moments with his son, and although he struggled to explain why, he stated those moments were "priceless" to him. Similarly towards the end of the interview Bertrand mentioned that he married his wife because he loved her. This was an unusual statement given how much of his earlier explanations had relied on morality, not emotion, but it was also a statement that showed him as a loving, caring husband. It was during moments like these that I empathized most with Bertrand.

In regard to gender, and as stated above, Bertrand's own position on gender seemed to vary greatly. Although at times he endorsed ideas, particularly in his personal life, that seemed to support a vision of gender equality, his language throughout the interview and distribution of blame for irresponsible fatherhood betrayed what I would consider a patriarchal social representation of gender difference (blaming single mothers

and unmarried women, for example, for the behavior of fathers). Although this was not the only difference in positionality on responsible fatherhood between his views and mine, this was the one with which I struggled the most and which posed the most difficulties for an empathic alliance with him. It was when he was able to give credit to the women in his life (his own mother, his wife) on the other hand, that I felt a deeper sense of connection to him.

### **Research question #1: Fatherhood and responsibility**

#### ***Understanding of fatherhood.***

Bertrand's understanding of fatherhood is grounded in biology. To father a child is to do so biologically, even if after conception one still has to live up to the responsibility imposed by that biological kinship. Although a man may decide not to take care of or be present in the life of his children, such a decision (particularly once he has "seen" his children) is akin to madness, a moment of biological self-denial that, to him, indicates a psychological problem. For Bertrand, biology determines fatherhood, a relationship that is different from any other relationship between men and children because of the biological bond that unites father and child. Bertrand, for example, tells the story of how his father decided to be present in his life after having initially turned away from him. It was biology –biology as manifested through physical resemblance– that made him go back on his earlier decision to abandon Bertrand:

SC: Okay, so it wasn't until... he wasn't present at the birth?

B: No, he wasn't present.

SC: But it was when he saw you for the first time that he realized...?

B: Yeah, that's what he said. And so it takes a certain amount of manhood,



testicular fortitude, in my opinion, to admit, you know, that you had this shortcoming or you had this will to not be a part of this person's life, being me. And then you see this person and you say, "You know what, maybe I made a mistake. I need to be a part...This is me." Because essentially you're taking two persons' DNA – my mother, my father, and combining it to make what you see. And so for one of those individuals who contributed their DNA to deny being a part of my life, that would almost be like them denying themselves. And that's like self-hatred, which goes into a spiral of, you know, insanity and, you know, senselessness. You just can't make sense of that. Why would one hate themselves, unless they have a psychological problem?

Similarly, Bertrand's relationship with his own son seems to also be marked by this moment of "seeing" the biological link. It is the awareness that his son is a part of him that pushes Bertrand towards responsible fatherhood:

B: But when I saw the sonogram, that's what really like, helps me to say, this is a part of me that is alive now and... and will continue to live, you know, Lord willing. And so, I have to do my part to make sure this life has the best life and the best of opportunities available.

Although Bertrand stated that "people often would deny their children," this happens because of the influence of culture (upbringing, drugs, social influence), an influence that drives people away from the call of biological kinship and that can result in them making selfish choices. The idea that "this is me," that there is a biological, natural or essential bond that separates the child's relationship with a biological father from any other type of relationship with a man is also why Bertrand, –who never had had a

stepfather himself- sees stepfathers as often creating problems, more, in fact than the lack of a daily father-figure presence does:

B: Just because, you know, most women do want to have someone there everyday so they often look outside of the father of their child to someone, and that can cause problems for that child because there's a man who comes in to the house, not the father, wants to create rules, wants to, you know, I guess, act maybe as a father like quasi-father, something like that, but he's not the child's actual father and that can be, that can put a strain on the relationship between the natural child and the natural mother.

Biological kinship is therefore the key marker of fatherhood. Its importance lies in its essential condition as a carrier of a particular legacy, a legacy that cannot be passed on without the biological link even in those cases, for example, when one adopts a child:

BP: Other than having a baby. I would teach my son, I mean, not that you need a woman for other things but primarily the only thing you cannot do without a woman is have a child. And you know, some folks may argue that, and they're saying like, "There's a gray area, you can adopt," but realistically to continue his legacy or our legacy, that's what you would need a woman for (...)

***Understanding of responsible fatherhood.***

Bertrand's understanding of responsibility is heavily grounded on a sense of universal moral obligation -in this case a moral obligation triggered by biological kinship. If biology creates the tie that determines fatherhood, the responsibility itself is born out of the moral obligations that come attached to that biological tie. To be a father (or more specifically, to father a child) is to be responsible for a child in specific ways, whether

one wants to or not. Men can run away from such responsibility, but the relationship itself and the responsibilities incurred do not change; the absent father is simply at fault in his responsibilities as a father. Responsibility here therefore is independent of the will of the father to take on the father-role, because it is dependent of biological kinship, not on a situational/contextual relationship.

When asked about his understanding of responsible fatherhood, Bertrand mentions presence and engagement first. It is the presence and engagement of the father in the life of the child that allows the father to do all the other things that “need” to be done:

SC: And so... what does responsible fatherhood... when you think of responsible fatherhood, what does it mean to you as a Black father?

B: For me, mainly...being a father, being around and engaged and... doing what I need to do, meaning like... help take care of the child, help provide for the child, giving the child guidance, teaching the child ethics, and basically being a role model for my child or children.

Fatherhood therefore carries a wide range of roles and obligations, some shared with a partner (childcare, being a provider) and others less directly so (being a role model, teaching ethics or providing guidance). The quote above also shows an important aspect of Bertrand’s view of responsible fatherhood: it occurs within the context of a committed relationship. Throughout his interview with me, Bertrand had a hard time conceptualizing the possibility that one could be responsible outside of a committed relationship where both father and mother live within the same household. Marriage in this context is the institution that guarantees the presence of the father in the household,

and as such becomes essential to responsible fatherhood:

B: Right, it's a responsibility, you know, and so, if you wanna really be a man then you need to, I think, just really get married and be there everyday, so you can deal with the little idiosyncrasies that a child experiences, like trips, slip and falls...

Finally, Bertrand does not directly endorse the playful or frolicsome dad image in his first description of those aspects important to responsible fatherhood. The image of the playful, frolicsome dad, however, consistently comes up throughout the interview. Examples of both his father and paternal grandfather as responsible and engaged include images of them playing with Bertrand. Similarly, when describing what is most precious to him about father-presence, Bertrand again evokes images of the frolicsome dad engaged in leisure activities with his children:

B:[...] I don't know that, that time... you know, when you have fun uh...or engage in activities of like, I guess... leisure with your child or children is, is, price, is, is, you know?...can put a cost to, I don't know if you could put a cost, attach a cost, or associate a cost with it, you know, like a dollar amount, cash. Those moments are priceless for me.

## **Research question #2: Narratives, voices**

### ***Narratives***

#### ***Family role models of responsible fatherhood.***

When asked how he came to his understandings of responsible fatherhood, Bertrand recounts the role that different male role models within his own family had in shaping his view of a responsible father. Amongst these, R.E. –his maternal grandfather–

is posited within the narrative as the best example of responsible fatherhood. As the two quotations below show, Bertrand observed throughout his childhood his grandfather to be an honest, hard-working man, always be present around his children.

B: R.E....he was a guy, wasn't rich, was not college educated but always worked...you know, always try to... be an example. He went to church; he was a business owner when I really was...uh... in my life...in the developmental stages of life, between like 10 and maybe like 13, 14...uh, and even through my teenage years (...) So, realizing that, being honest and being a decent person, I felt like... that will allow me to live (laughs softly) to be, you know... a good, a good role model, a good father, those kinds of things... rather than being dishonest.

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B: [M]y grandfather, was more so like, always around his children who would be my mother and my aunts, his wife. He was at church with them... when they had babies he was there (laughs) You know... he was always around, that's why I used him...

The figure of Bertrand's maternal grandfather is made to stand in contrast to other unnamed male figures within his family which were either dishonest ("family members who were dishonest, for lack of better term, not necessarily with me... but they engaged in dishonest activities to survive") or, in the case some of his uncles, were too busy being providers to be regularly present in the lives of their children:

Bertrand: I have uncles who were good role models as males too but oftentimes, you'd feel like they were just working all the time and...that constant "being around"...It seemed like maybe as they got older, they... they were around more

but when I was younger, man, It'd be like, “Oh, there... where’s uncle so and so?”  
“He’s at work, he’s out.” After his first job and then he had a second job, I was  
like, man, are you going to spend some time with your family?

Similarly to Bertrand’s maternal grandfather, Bertrand’s paternal grandfather is also used as an example of responsibility in the interview, although only when I asked directly about him. His role as an influence is less clear, perhaps because their relationship is more distant. Bertrand spent less time with him –presumably because of his parents separation– but keeps positive memories about him. He was “hands-on,” and liked to “build things” with him when they spent time together. Bertrand’s description of his paternal grandfather in fact resembles that of Bertrand’s own father (“when my father was around, he was around, you know, just like he and I would spend a lot of time together in the basement making things, playing with remote control cars, racing them...”), although the figure of Bertrand’s father is more complex in its influence over Bertrand’s views on responsible fatherhood, as can be seen below.

*Bertrand’s father.*

Bertrand’s biological father and the narrative that recounts their relationship, exerts a powerful influence over Bertrand’s understanding of responsible fatherhood, although the direction of this influence is dependent on the context in which it is brought up. His example, in fact, straddles both the social representation of the absent/irresponsible father and that of the present/responsible father to such an extent that it can be unclear, overall, which role he is made to represent. Bertrand’s father’s narrative is presented at first as a narrative of redemption. He had a child from a previous relationship when he and Bertrand’s mother became pregnant with Bertrand. Not wanting

to have another child, he left Bertrand's mother and was determined to not have any contact with them or be present in their life. But after seeing Bertrand "in passing" he changed his mind and realized he could not turn his back on him, making an effort then to reconcile with Bertrand's mother so as to be able to be present in Bertrand's life:

B: [F]or a long time, he really wanted to fight not having a child and again I think it's his character... he wants to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it. And... that selflessness that I talked about is really not something he wants to adapt, but he said, you know, after he had seen me in passing like, as an infant, that's when he realized, you know, I was a part of him and he needed to be a part of my life. And so at that point, he tried to reconcile with my mother.

This is an important moment in the narrative, as it serves to support the argument of fatherhood as an essential biological link. Bertrand's father's realization that Bertrand was "a part of him" comes upon seeing him, upon seeing their physical resemblance. Although this is a key moment that marks the transition from irresponsible to responsible father, Bertrand's father never really fully occupies the "present father" role in the narrative—at least in the way Bertrand conceptualizes it—after that. Bertrand's father remains an elusive figure that is made to represent responsible fatherhood and irresponsible fatherhood equally, depending on the context. In general terms, for example, Bertrand endorses the idea that he grew-up without a father, raised by a single mother:

SC: You have mentioned how you grew up without a father yourself.

B: Right, right, I'm...

SC: Present, everyday, right?

B: Right.

B: Right...Right and the thing is I feel like, growing up, my mother being a single parent -my parents didn't live together- I feel like my mom would have done a lot of those things for me...

Because a committed relationship where both fathers are under the same roof is – in Bertrand's view– such an important aspect of responsible fatherhood, Bertrand's father cannot completely occupy the responsible fatherhood spot in the narrative. If to be responsible one needs to be present everyday to deal with the daily challenges of raising a child, then Bertrand's father could not be considered fully responsible. And yet his examples at times also suggests otherwise. In the example below, Bertrand recounts how his mother, by never taking another partner, allowed for his father and him to develop a relationship, a relationship that seems, on the surface, to push Bertrand's father to the role of responsible father:

SC: So you think in that sense, biology, I mean... the father, there's a difference between a...between a biological father or natural father, and a stepfather. A difference that is important, at least in your experience, you were saying, you're grateful that there wasn't a stepfather in your house.

B: Right, because I feel like it allowed for the relationship between my father and I to be as authentic as it could be, you know, inclusive of my mother, because she was still involved, you know, like both my parents would go to events like if I have banquet, you know, for sports or for academic reasons, then both of my parents would come. Parental conferences both of my parents would come. And so, I feel like, if nothing else; people knew that both of my parents were invested.



And so, the fact that they didn't, we did not, we all did not live in the same household really didn't matter, on the outside, I guess it would matter to my mother, it would matter to some degree to me how my father felt, but outside of our household, both my parents were involved.

In a way, Bertrand's father provides a lived example that manages to narratively straddle and perhaps challenge Bertrand's ideas of responsibility and irresponsibility, although Bertrand never directly acknowledges that in the interview. Never married, never in a committed relationship, but consistently present for the big moments in Bertrand's life, his figure is elusive within Bertrand's own classification system. This "straddling" role is not limited to the sphere of presence, but also in regards to his power as an ethical example and role model. In the excerpt below, for example, he is used as a role model, an example of ethical conduct in the work sphere and some aspects of his personal life:

B: And even my father, I don't know that... I'm gonna say he was as altruistic or religious if you will, but always was a hard worker. There were times I would go to work with him, he would do his job and... you know, do it to the best of his ability even at times if the jobs, or the...the work responsibilities were difficult and at times I felt like he was, being set up for failure but he would always, you know, do what he needed to do and so, yeah.

SC: So that's what... what you're gonna try to teach, are you trying to teach to your son in terms of ethics?

B: Absolutely, as well as not, you know, engaging in activities, man, like drugs or drinking... like, that's something my father never did, never took drug, never

drank, never smoke, uh...you know. I don't know, I mean, as I'm growing older, those things just don't appeal to me. So, I guess they didn't appeal to him either but you know. He said he's always spoke highly of not doing that... being a Service Member in the Navy, in the United States Navy, he said, even then, he's never engaged in those activities.

Yet a little bit later in the narrative, when speaking of the selflessness required for being a father, Bertrand provides his father as an example of selfishness:

B: I mean I think anytime you want a father, you know, if you do this in a conscious manner, you're going to have to have a certain amount of selflessness (...) And I don't know that my father has a willingness to maybe to do that, you know. There are certain things that he may want that he's just going to get those things and he doesn't want anyone questioning, you know, his reasons or purpose.

SC: You say that with a smile, I wonder... is it that you're speaking in terms of women, other women, being with other women or...

B: Oh, I'm saying, anything... whether it be a car, if you want to buy a second home, if he wants to go to vacation in Vegas...

SC: So he doesn't have to be accountable to someone.

B: Right, right.

Bertrand's father's narrative is, as it is weaved within Bertrand's views on responsible fatherhood, a powerful and recurrent example of both responsibility and irresponsibility. It is the most complex character in the narrative because it both stands for and against many of the positions Bertrand takes on issues such as ethics, relationships, fatherhood, presence and marriage. It is perhaps the last of these issues –

marriage— that separates both most clearly in regards to responsibility, and that highlights the key role that marriage plays for Bertrand in guaranteeing presence of the father in the household.

B: So, for me, like marriage is, I don't know, for me it's a, it's a commitment to like, responsible fathering. And so I feel like I lock my self in because I could always say I wanna get a divorce but I'm giving up so much, in my opinion, and not necessarily the materialistic things that I have but more so those opportunities of observing my child develop. So I can say to my son when he gets older, I can say I was there when you were born. My father cannot say that to me. I can say to my son, "I was there for your first Christmas." My father couldn't say that to me, you know. And so many of those things and I'd say, why would you like, conceptually, I cannot fathom missing out of any of those opportunities I spoke of. Even if I was broke, so for whatever reason, if I was broke and destitute, I would still want, you know, my son to know, you know, I'm proud of you and I want the best for you.

### *Voices*

All of the dominant relational voices in Bertrand's narrative belong to Bertrand's family. Whether it is his grandparents, his father, his mother, or his wife, it is the voices of family members that support Bertrand's narrative on responsible fatherhood. Bertrand relies initially on the male role models of his family to speak for how he arrived to his understanding of responsible fatherhood. Of these, two voices stand out above all others in the influence they exert over Bertrand's views: his maternal grandfather and his biological father. His maternal grandfather's voice stands most clearly for the responsible

fatherhood position. His voice is the voice of ethics, the ideal, powerful in its influence over Bertrand's views on fatherhood and responsibility. The voice of Bertrand's father, as described above, is consistently called on to stand for a number of positions along the narrative. His voice speaks from both inside and outside of Bertrand's values, its resonance along Bertrand's understanding of responsible fatherhood complex and varied.

Additionally, and besides Bertrand's father and grandfather, two other relational voices are powerfully present in Bertrand's narrative. Of these, Bertrand's wife's voice is the strongest, similar in a way to his grandfather's in its clarity. Her voice is the voice of balance, of stability, of domesticity. Her voice is also, however, surprisingly absent from Bernard's initial thoughts on responsible fatherhood, although it becomes stronger as the interview goes on. As it can be seen in the quotations below, she reminds Bertrand of his obligations while also helping him maintain a balance in life:

B: I would say you know... being married right now since July 2006, for five years, I felt like my wife helps me to maintain a sense of balance and never going too extreme to... an area of being a slacker or lackadaisical about life as well as not being not too hard on myself which is difficult. (...) Additionally though, I think somewhere in that middle ground, my wife's consistently saying, well, you know, there is a role I have to play like ...like you gotta be a father, you have to help with the responsibilities... even though they might be traditionally things that a woman would do, I need to do them, you know.

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B: [I]f I ever were to deviate from that process, my wife is the person who will say, "But realistically are you being sincere? Are you sharing the responsibilities

in an equal manner?” So I have to ask myself if I’m not in the instance. I would have to ask myself, you do what I do need to...um... improve and step up.

Finally, the voice of his mother, present at various points in the responsible fatherhood narrative, appears perhaps as the most muted when considering that she played the biggest role in Bertrand’s upbringing. Bertrand was raised by his mother, a single parent, with ongoing support from her extended family (her parents and sisters). He gives examples of how she had expectations both in regard to how he should be as a man and his behavior growing up within the household:

B: My mother is always held me accountable for things and you know her premise on rearing a son was that, you know, either take care of him now or you take care of him later. So you either pay now or you pay later. So she raised me to be independent so she wanted to pay, so to speak, on the front end and she wanted to train me up to be independent and self-sufficient so that I would not have to make her pay later

B: My mother, she was the one who I thought can go against my belief. She could be very rigid at times, very, just stern and...

SC: Do you think that is because she was a single parent or...?

B: Right and also you know, she wanted to kind of, she wanted to let me know that I needed to respect her, you know, that’s my belief.

Her voice in the narrative, however, seems secondary when compared to the voices of other family members. Although Bertrand does indicate she played a big role in his upbringing, her voice as a presence on the responsible fatherhood narrative is less powerful than other voices within the family.

### **Research question #3: Positions**

#### ***Fatherhood***

Bertrand privileges the father-child biological link in his overall understanding of fatherhood. This position in regards to fatherhood –that fatherhood is determined by biology– positions him also in regards to social fatherhood. Although Bertrand did not actually address the overall importance of social fatherhood within black communities—a telling omission, perhaps– he does make it clear that stepfathers or adoptive fathers, for example, are not like biological fathers. Without a biological link, social fathers cannot be fathers *per se*. Even if they can take a father-role in the life of a child, they are, by nature of their constructed relationship, less important than biological fathers.

Fatherhood, for Bertrand, carries one main obligation: that of being present in the life of a child. It is presence that enables the father to fulfill other fatherhood obligations and responsibilities, such as activities related to childcare, being a role model, providing guidance or teaching ethics. Since for Bertrand the main way of guaranteeing presence in the life of a child is through a committed relationship, marriage –the flagship of committed relationships– becomes the single most important step towards guaranteeing responsible fatherhood. Bertrand’s position on fatherhood and responsibility is ultimately deeply intertwined with marriage. Marriage is the institution that facilitates father presence and, consequently, the fulfillment of all other fatherhood obligations. Marriage also facilitates the fulfillment of certain responsibilities inherent to raising a child, such as childcare or being a provider, as these can be shared with the mother of the child. Bertrand’s views on marriage and father-presence present a lived ideological dilemma in regard to his own father. Bertrand’s father never married his mother, and he was not

present in the household during his upbringing, yet Bertrand uses him as an example of responsibility often: he is present at all important events and committed to being a part of Bertrand's life since the first time he sees him.

Bertrand's endorsement of the provider role as a part of responsible fatherhood also shows a dilemma. Although Bertrand endorses the role of the father as a provider, he also points to how difficult it can be to fulfill that role for black fathers in communities where there are no good paying jobs. Pointing out this difficulty, which he identifies as a clear obstacle to fulfilling father responsibilities, runs contrary to some of the criticism he makes of members of his own family within the interview. Bertrand criticizes some of his uncles for working "all the time" and rarely being present in the daily lives of their children, a criticism that seems to imply working "all the time" is a personal choice, not a reality of trying to make a living in communities where, as he will state later, there are no good paying jobs.

### ***Fatherhood and race***

As opposed to his position on fatherhood, Bertrand's position on race favors a social constructionist view over an essentialist one. Race plays a role in responsible fatherhood because of how race is constructed in society. This position is maintained throughout the interview. Being black, for example, is an added challenge because how race is seen within society, but not because of any differentiating trait essential to blackness:

B: I think it's more difficult in short for a black male to father based upon the economics, based upon what, what is readily available to him...um... Kinda based upon how he's viewed in society in general, you know, I don't know that, you

know when I walk into a store or when I walk into an institution of higher education depending upon how I'm dressed, people are going to automatically assume like, "This guy works for a public entity with parents and children. He is a responsible father, he pays all his bills on time, his debt is limited to college education. Doesn't have a felony, maybe been arrested one time in his life for something superficial," I don't know if people see that. And again, depending on how I'm dressed when I walk into those places, so... as a Black male and a father I feel like I'm thinking about all of these things where I don't know if someone who is, you know, white, has to think about these things. I don't know if someone who is Hispanic, considers these things or Jewish or you know, from other ethnic groups. Um...And so I think that does play a role, a large role, you know... my ethnicity.

Bertrand points to both structural and cultural impediments to responsible fatherhood, although places more weight on the side of structure. Differences in economic opportunities –particularly the availability of good paying jobs– for men of different racial backgrounds result in different challenges when trying to be responsible fathers. In the following quotation Bertrand highlights specifically the type of things a father has and does not have access to as an important factor impacting his ability to be a responsible father. Specifically, he points to the things that are readily available to black males in black communities versus those that may be available to men in other communities:

BP: I mean just looking at the economics of our society and you know, what a Black male has unlimited access to versus what other fathers are males from



different ethnic groups have like unlimited or a lot of access to...so when you begin to look at those things, you look at...look at it, you know, from a large perspective, you're gonna say, "What things do...does a Black male have, I mean... a lot of access to?...he has a lot of access to drugs, has a lot of access to alcohol, has a great deal of access to women. All those things that I have named though are negative versus what I would say folks from other ethnic groups have accessible to them. And when I say accessible, I'm saying readily accessible, when you walk out your door, the stuff is there, you know, the alcohol is there and when I say the alcohol, I'm talking about bars. If you go to most Black communities, plenty of bars, plenty of drugs, plenty of women who are often not married - who are often single with or without child – and so... inversely you know, some folks may argue that "This is everywhere, anyone has these available to them," but I'm talking about readily available... so when we talk about, "Does race play a component? I'm gonna say yes, because if you say "are jobs readily available?", good jobs – jobs that offer a salary that will provide, you know, a man, a black man with an opportunity to have a excellent quality of life – I don't know, I don't know and then you look at just opportunities, I'll say, so I'll say that, I don't know that opportunities are the same for Black men so therefore, I look at that economic piece (...)

Bertrand includes, with the structural conditions leading to lack of jobs and increased drug/alcohol availability, the abundance of unmarried women. The latter example –further explored below for its connotations on gender and marriage–points away from structural factors and to cultural factors instead. Although, as stated, Bertrand

gives more importance to structural factors overall in his explanation of impediments to responsible fatherhood, he highlights also the impact of cultural factors, particularly those posed by the influence of absent and unfaithful fathers and the overall lack of good role models within the family:

BP: (...) You know... one of the things that I would say, might be themselves and when I say themselves, I'm talking about their view as individuals on fatherhood, and based on, you know, I guess wherever they developed these views, whether it came from their fathers... and I think within Black communities, these are often absentee fathers. And in some instances, there are fathers present who are instilling those things that are negative and not positive, you know, in children, you know like dishonesty, consumption of drug and alcohol; um...you know if they're married in some instances, folks are having affairs; they're fathering children outside of the home. So if children, young Black men, are observing these things and they're learning, these behaviors early on their life and I believe that helps them to develop a certain thought process as to what it means to be a father and what it means to be a black man, and how they should live. And if they follow the example then it's gonna perpetuate, it can perpetuate, you know, a cycle that leads folks down on the wrong path.

### ***Fatherhood and gender***

Bertrand shows perhaps the most dilemmas in relation to gender. Although at times he seems in effect to be arguing that gender is a social construction, he also will state there are essential differences to what each gender brings to the table in regards to raising a child. Throughout the interview Bertrand speaks in loving, respectful and

admiring ways of his wife. He gives her credit for keeping him balanced and reminding him of his responsibilities in life, and it is clear from the way in which he describes their relationship that he considers her his equal. Bertrand's description of their daily life also speaks to gender equality. Bertrand, for example, explains there is an equal distribution of chores in his household. Bertrand stated that although he was not brought up in that way (his mom did most of the chores in his house) marriage has brought with it a different reality, one where he regularly performs many of the chores "traditionally" associated with women:

B: ...Cooking dinner, cleaning more, everything from like dusting and not just like major chores such as mopping, garbage, grass cutting but you know, the minor chores – dusting, polishing, cleaning windows - all those things.

SC: So... You would say that in your relationship at least... certainly...

B: Sure.

SC: you... you have an equal distribution of chores and...

B: Absolutely.

Bertrand also states he plans to teach his son to be independent, primarily through having him participate in house chores and childcare duties. In Bertrand's mind, there isn't any particular activity tied to a specific gender, except for those having to do with biology and reproduction. Although overtly part of what Bertrand seems to be arguing for is equality between genders, in the excerpt below we can see how the choice of words ("need," "legacy") also suggests traditional patriarchal motifs: women are needed to perpetuate male legacy.

SC: So there are no, as far as you're concerned, there is nothing... there's nothing

that is tied, no activity or no obligation that is tied to gender?

B: Other than having a baby. I would teach my son, I mean, not that you need a woman for other things but primarily the only thing you cannot do without a woman is have a child. And you know, some folks may argue that, and they're saying like, "There's a gray area, you can adopt," but realistically to continue his legacy or our legacy, that's what you would need a woman for and you know... And also you know the Bible talks about man and woman joining and becoming one but still everything else he can do...

For Bernard, the equality in practice also doesn't seem to be so in essence. Even if men and women are equal and have equal responsibilities within the context of a marriage, they bring different, unique things to the table. Bertrand argues for a vision of the father as the law, the embodiment in gender of discipline and structure ("personally, my personal belief is that men bring like structure, men bring discipline, men bring more of a rigid guideline to child rearing to the household than a mother would.") This would seemingly support a vision of women as less disciplined and structured. Seconds later, when asked about his own mother, Bertrand argues she is an exception, and was in fact rigid and stern, something he has also seen in other women.

B: Mothers, I've seen mothers often, in some instances, there are mothers who can go against my belief and be as rigid or more so rigid than a male, but mothers often give in to their children, you know...

SC: Is that from your own experiences in your house or in just general like what you see...

B: Oh, no. My mother, she was the one who I thought can go against my belief.

She could be very rigid at times, very, just stern and...

Finally, and as the first quote in the previous section shows, Bertrand attributes to the neighborhood abundance of “unmarried women” one of the impediments to responsible fatherhood within black communities. The image promoted here –unmarried women as temptress sirens that lure men away from responsible behaviors- is repeated later on. Bertrand makes the argument while discussing the same theme that the abundance of women in college can lead black men away from fulfilling their potential.

B: If we were to take a look at...take a few steps back from the kind of adulthood and you go to like you know colleges and universities and that’s speaking from my vantage point because that’s where I’ve been. And so while I was a student at Clarion University of Pennsylvania for my undergraduate degree, there were just not that very many black males, so there were a considerable number of Black females and that takes a ratio, that creates a ratio, which I believe was maybe like for every one black male, and I’m just gonna limit this to black or African American students on campus.... One black male to, I don’t know, maybe four to five black females, you know, not to also include the other women from within the student population who may like Black guys, if you will.

SC: Ah-hum.

Bertrand: So then, I mean, some guys’ egos may be stroked, if you will, and I said, “Oh, yeah, everyone likes me” you know, especially because, generally, Black males are athletes..um... popular, –in my instance, that wasn’t my... –but they can, often have like women gravitate toward them. And so, I wouldn’t... they have like..., I don’t wanna say readily available but so many to choose from and

that to some degree can take your focus from what...where it needs to be, and misguided in many directions based upon whatever these women are kinda taking your mind, so.

The contrast between how women in Bertrand's family (married, such as his wife, or unmarried, such as his mother) are described versus how the general category "women" is depicted shows a dilemma around gender. This ideological dilemma is solved in practice through differentiating between women in his family and women outside of it.

In the context of gender relations, Bertrand's position in regards to marriage is that it is the structure that facilitates responsible fatherhood. Bertrand struggled in the interview (see below) with the idea that cohabitation could lead to the same type of father-presence than marriage. In Bertrand's eyes any type of relationship outside of marriage implies the father can be outside of the household more easily and as such he cannot, therefore, fulfill his responsibilities as a father:

BP: Right. Um...I think it is possible however I feel like, when you're not married and I don't wanna say you're not restricted to be in the house all the time that you're automatically limiting yourself just in that but to some degree by not being in that house... every opportunity that you have to be available I think you are gonna limit yourself to being a lesser responsible father.

Marriage, as an institution, is domesticating, it civilizes both men and women. Given Bertrand's statement on "unmarried women" -and although he never pronounces himself on this- it can be assumed marriage turns unmarried women from sexual temptations and impediments of responsible fatherhood, to committed wives. In regard to fathers, marriage keeps them in the household, restraining their ability to leave and

ultimately holding them accountable for their actions:

B: [F]or me, marriage absolutely does... consciously; I can say consciously, it tells me, Okay, you know you have to go home at night. You know you cannot do anything that will shame the name of myself, my wife's name, my son's name. Not that I wanna do any of these things but sometimes, you know, people get caught up in activities. So, for me it kind of, like I said, locks me into that responsible fathering and husbanding and...

### **Overall Summary**

Bertrand's understanding of fatherhood is based on biology. A father is he who has biologically fathered a child. The biological relationship carries specific obligations and responsibilities –primarily being present and engaged, although also taking care of the child, providing economically, teaching ethics, or providing guidance in life. These obligations and responsibilities are tied to biological kinship, and as such independent of the will of the father. Denying a child does not free you of your responsibilities; it simply means you are not living-up to your responsibilities as a father.

Bertrand's understanding of responsible fatherhood is the result of several contrasting family narratives. On the one hand, Bertrand's maternal grandfather's figure is used as a role model of responsible fatherhood and the fulfillment of the obligations and responsibilities described above. On the other hand, other unnamed family members are used as a contrast to exemplify cases of father absence or unethical behavior, and are therefore made to stand for irresponsible fatherhood. Bertrand's father's narrative is perhaps the most important in regards to his understanding of responsible fatherhood. It occupies conflicting spots along the responsibility continuum. He straddles responsibility

and irresponsibility, and his example is a constant reference point for Bertrand throughout the interview.

Similar to Bertrand's narratives, the dominant voices within the interview are all voices of family members. Of these, two male voices already mentioned influence Bertrand's view of fatherhood: that of Bertrand's maternal grandfather –which appears only initially but clearly speaks to the ideal father throughout– and that of Bertrand's own father, which speaks to the importance of responsible fatherhood by providing lived examples of both responsibility and irresponsibility. The voice of Bertrand's wife –the voice of stability and domesticity– is a frequent anchor point in the narrative, a stabilizing presence and reminder of the importance of responsibility in the context of marriage and the family. Finally, Bertrand's mother has the weakest voice of all the main relational voices in the narrative despite having played the largest role in Bertrand's upbringing. Her voice speaks to the “good” single mother, who sacrifices her desires in the interest of her son and who despite not being married never takes on another man again.

Bertrand's positions on some of the major themes within the responsible fatherhood field point to several conflicts. His endorsement of presence and the provider role as important parts of responsible fatherhood presents a problem when thinking of fathers for whom being both present and a provider is not a real possibility. Bertrand, for example, points to the lack of good jobs within black communities as a major factor in irresponsible fatherhood, yet also criticizes his uncles for “working all the time.” Bertrand also endorses a non-essentialized vision of race, yet he endorses essentialized visions of fatherhood and gender. Finally, it is in regard to the latter that Bertrand takes the most conflicted position. Although he seems to initially endorse gender equality



within his own marriage, he also seems to blame single mothers and unmarried women for the irresponsible behavior of men, and resorts to patriarchal language often to explain his position on different issues (the idea of men bringing discipline into the home, or of a particular male “legacy” that is passed on biologically).

Reflexively, I entered the interview thinking that, out of the five participants I would feel closest experientially to Bertrand. A reflexive reading reveals two major issues that seemed to condition my ability to empathize and connect with the text: the extent to which the language used by Bertrand reflected moral values over interpersonal connection, and the different language and positions taken on gender differences by each of us.

## **David**

### **Introduction**

David, a part-time after-school teacher, held a leadership position in the group the year I began volunteering at the PPSMFIP. A big, confident 31-year old typically well-dressed in matching urban-style clothing, he seemed always in a good mood. When I first met him, David had recently become the proud father of a little girl (his second child, the first one an eight year-old from a previous relationship), bringing her frequently with him to group planning meetings. I remember being surprised at how good this baby –who could not have been more than a few months old– was, remaining silent in her car seat over meetings that often lasted over two hours. I took immediately the baby’s model behavior and her consistent pristine appearance as evidence of David’s merits as a father, even if at the time I knew little of David’s life outside of the group. Although I never questioned David’s investment in and dedication to being a father, his oozing

overconfidence as a father and loud assertions to it could be at times striking. I remember David making statements on a couple of occasions to his worthiness and/or greatness as a father (both in general and in comparison to other fathers) and being surprised at his words; that someone could claim father-greatness as an athlete might claim physical prowess. That relationship to fatherhood –one where one’s worthiness as a father can be confidently claimed and measured in relation to other fathers’ performance– seemed awkward to me, the material perhaps of inner thoughts and not vocalized assertions. David’s boasting, however, never came across as offensive or arrogant, but mostly innocent, the outward expression of fatherhood pride in a context where excellence in fatherhood practices is one of the main measures of a man’s worth.

Although David never asked me any questions in regard to my life outside of the group, he was one of the participants to react more positively to the idea of participating in my study. The first time I went through the recruiting script he was quick to state that studies like mine (looking at black fathers) were important and necessary and he would be glad to participate –all of this despite his limited knowledge at the time of the details surrounding my work. The interview itself took place at his job, a old building housing an after-school educational program where he taught computer skills part-time to struggling Middle School and High School students. When we met for the interview (and before we started the official recording) he again reasserted his excitement over participating. The interview itself went smoothly. It was conducted in a closed classroom interrupted only one time, briefly, by his boss. A few days after that I saw David again at a meeting and he mentioned having enjoyed the interview, although he felt he had let loose too much when speaking about issues related to race. It was a surprisingly candid moment that caught me

off guard and that we unfortunately we did not get to speak about further (the group meeting began at that point) and never came back to after that.

### **Reflexive reading summary<sup>3</sup>**

Prior to us meeting, my impressions about David were mixed. Although I liked him, I was unsure of how much he would be able to contribute to this study. He was always nice to me and seemed relatively open to conversation, but we had never spoken in any length about any of topics related to this dissertation. My perception of him within the group made me assume he would primarily speak to his condition as a father and to other topics in general terms, but that he would provide very little in terms of depth and complexity. This assumption proved to be wrong, and his interview became in many ways one of the most powerful ones, both personally for me and in terms of the depth and complexity of the material offered.

The reflexive reading unveils some of my reactions to David's story in ways that both highlight my connection to him emotionally and the play of difference between us. Overall, two large reflexive themes stand out. First, there is the sense of connection to David's narrative as a son. This narrative –detailing his relationship as a son to both his biological absent father and his present and engaged stepfather– opened up the doors to connect emotionally with David during the interview. This connection achieved its emotional peak at the moment in which David spoke of his stepfather's suicide. The loss of my stepfather by suicide –as unimaginable event in my case, as it was in his– would be devastating, and elicited a deep sense of sadness also upon re-reading the interview. It is a moment that drastically changed my view of David then, and that serves as a point of

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for the full reflexive reading of David's interview

reference in that regard now. Second, there is the play of difference between us. David's experience of the world as a threatening place is remarkably different from mine, and severely conditions both his and my views of fatherhood and responsibility. The impact of race and racism, his experiences with "hustling," as well his experiences going through Family Division and custody hearings all highlighted the differences between us while also, experientially, becoming important learning moments for me. Even if I didn't agree with some of the conclusions David draws through his experiences, I believe I was able to empathetically understand how he got there.

Reflexively there were other salient themes, like my reactions to David's antagonistic positioning in regards to women outside of his family, his capacity to surprise me by taking unexpected positions (such as divorcing fatherhood from biology) or his ability to confront his biological father about the impact of his absence (something I never did with mine). Above all, however, what stands out the most is both my sense of deep emotional connection early on in the interview, and the experience I had of learning throughout our meeting, both of which were unexpected given my assumptions about him prior to the interview.

### **Research question #1: Fatherhood and responsibility**

#### ***Understanding of fatherhood***

David's view of fatherhood is one where biological kinship is secondary to the decision to be a father, in this case understood as a decision to be present, to participate actively in the life of a child. In fact, the ideas of biological kinship, of biological inheritance or biological responsibility were almost entirely absent during our interview. Biology seemed to merely serve the function of describing a particular type of

relationship that helped differentiate possible father role models (biological father, stepfather, local father, drug dealer, etc.). For David fatherhood is a choice, one that is made primarily by the individual choosing to be present, choosing to fulfill the father role in the child's life. This choice, however, is not unidirectional, but involves also the child who is "hungry" for information and will actively look for someone to fulfill the role of the father, to provide the information necessary to survive and learn about the world. Although this may be the biological father –that is, biology kinship may facilitate the taking-up of the father role– it may also be another male in the child's life. There is a sense of opportunity involved here, where the child searches for a father figure and it is the father's daily presence (not his biological relationship to the child) that helps determine that role. When asked directly if fatherhood is determined by biology or not, David states

D: I would say wherever you can get the information from wherever you take it is what would make you, you know... of course you take the nutrients and do away with the things that can cause some type of harm, I mean, you take the meat and spit out the bones with regards the information that you receive from whoever whether it would be your father, your step father or the local parent, the local drug dealer. I think that's one thing that's embedded and I really can't say, you know, for just blacks or whatever I think that's just embedded.

David emphasizes here the role of the child as an active recipient of information from a variety of sources, some representing stronger traditional father figures than others. The idea of passing on information is in fact central to David's views on fatherhood. David views teaching -after presence- as the most important activity

associated with fatherhood. To be a father is, above everything else, to be present and to teach. His emphasis on these two aspects is evident in the segments below:

D: I will say, being consistent in regards to your presence inside... you know, the child's life... always being mindful of the things that you are trying to teach to your children...um... but also being mindful of the things that you don't want to teach them...um... making sure that you put it out of the way of their eyes and their ears and their senses...

D: You have to be present and you have to constantly know that you're educating, you have to be aware that you are educating all the time.

Teaching for David is a wide ranging interaction with the child involving activities traditionally associated with education, but also others such as being a role model, a mentor or a disciplinarian. All of these are seen as integral aspects of "teaching." Because David sees children as learning constantly from their surroundings, by being present, by being constantly there, the father is able to control most of the sources of information of the child, becoming a filter between the child and the outside world. David conceptualizes the role of the father as necessary, unique, and fulfilling the role in the same manner regardless of the gender of the child. What is important is the hunger of the child and the presence of the father to take over as the child's role model and main source of information:

D: I'm not one who wants to listen to the whole "takes a man to raise a man," and nor do I listen to the whole, "it takes a woman to raise a woman." I don't believe in those. What I believe in is, with any child given any circumstances, the child has to be hungry enough to go and seek the information that they need.

Although the gender of the children seems irrelevant when it comes to the importance of the father in the child's life, gender is an important differentiator between mothers and fathers. The uniqueness of the father's job is described in relation to mothers. Fathers provide a "blueprint" for life, mothers teach math, reading and other school subjects. Although David hints at strength as a differentiating factor between genders, he retracts when he thinks of the strong women within his own family, and decides ultimately that the difference relies in method. The actual life lessons are the same, it is the way in which they are taught that makes fathers and mothers different. Fathers are tougher and mothers more nurturing in the ways in which they show the child how to "control the environment." Hierarchically, however, and within these differences, the father is at the top of the hierarchy, the "king of the pride."

D: [...] of course she, she was teaching me, you know, the fundamentals of, you know, reading math and so on and so forth but they taught me the blueprint of life, the blueprint of what a man should do, whether it was moral from my mistakes or learn it from there the words or learn it from their hands on blessings, it was all education you know.

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D: I would say the strength part but then again, I know a lot of strong...almost every single one of my family members -female family members- are like, extremely strong. But, making sure that, they know that I'm most definitely the king of the pride, like showing him how to control the environment. Can a woman do it? I'm sure, will it be more nurturing? Possibly. Yeah But I wouldn't cheat, [the children] out from lessons taught by their moms, because they do have to be

there – they... I tell people all the time even though I do have full custody of T,, he still needs his mother. So, no. I don't think that... I just think it's different, so different. It's the same lesson, but it's been taught differently from male and females...

Notoriously absent from David's understanding of fatherhood are any traditional modern endorsements of social representations of the father as nurturing/loving, playful/frolicsome or performing any duties related to childcare. The role of the father as provider is also absent, mentioned only once during the interview in relation to the perception that in jobs black women are being hired more often than black men, and the impact this has on men since "as long as you can remember, the first mission that a man was to have –once he became a man– was to become a provider." The role of provider is therefore associated here with being a defining aspect of manhood, and not actually fatherhood. This differentiation is revelatory and may point to an dilemma between the idea of father presence and the role of a man as a provider.

### ***Understanding of responsible fatherhood***

David's understanding of responsibility, as distilled from our interview, is one that is born primarily out of a specific choice, and the consequent relationship and daily engagement with another human being as a result of that choice. Again, and as with the word "father," an individual becomes responsible because he takes on a particular role that comes with certain responsibilities. The understanding of responsibility that is hinted at throughout the interview is therefore highly contextual and relational. To be responsible is to respond to the other in a particular way that both claims and is claimed by the other (in this case, and as can be seen in the excerpts above, a child who is



“hungry” for guidance and information about his/her surroundings). The nature of the response (*how* one is responsible) does not seem to be distilled from religious, social or moral codes –even if those are hinted at in a couple of responses– but from highly contextual and adaptive ones, where to be responsible is to help guide the other through a world that is hostile, dangerous and unpredictable, and that requires particular skills to survive. The daily danger of this world to both father and child is evident in the excerpts below:

D: As a man, you shall never want your child to seek information from someone else, because sometimes that information that they get might jeopardize them, their family, their livelihood...

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D: Opportunities to be incarcerated where I live is – probably is high, is just, like the opportunity to walk out of the house and dying. Both those things can happen, like... within the blink of an eye in these communities, going to jail. You can go to jail and you just sitting down like, what the hell did I do to get in jail? And there is times where it's just like, how did I just come outside, to get fresh air in, and a bullet just passed my head? That is something that can happen any given day.

For David, therefore, being a responsible father requires: 1) Taking on a father role with a child, a role that is defined by the father’s daily presence in the child’s life and his role as a teacher, and 2) Doing so within a world that is hostile and unpredictable and requires specific adaptive skills to survive. Within this context, being a responsible father implies first of all assuring one’s presence in the life of the child. Incarceration, violence,

divorce/separation or involvement of family services are all possible threats to the presence of the father in the child's life.

D: And every time you violate parole, you got to do time. Your girl's gonna leave you, or she is going to find somebody else or you just going to tell her I can't...we can't do this, and that leaves the child as the biggest victim.

D: Family Division first and foremost when you break the words down you have a family and then you have the word division, which is to divide, and it's like before you walk in there, you can walk in there as a shaky family that isn't whole, but you'll walk out divided for sure

Staying away from jail and illegal activities where violence is common, and being aware of one's rights as a father within the legal system are all ways in which to help assure your presence in the child's life. For David presence is the bedrock upon which the main activity of being a father –teaching– takes place. The “blueprint” for life that a father teaches a child involves lessons (strength, being “smart,” toughness) that will help him/her survive in a menacing world. Guaranteeing that those lessons are learned is part of the responsibility of a father. For David the delivery of the lessons is important and makes a difference in comparison to other fathers and mothers. Being constant, being aware of how your child learns and maintaining discipline are the keys to ensuring the child learns:

D: you always wants your child in ...you know, in a black community to grow up to be strong, you know, the whole "only the strong survive." But they also have to be smart, you want to teach them the difference between a warrior and a

barbarian, um... you want them to strategize whatever, whatever it takes, so you want them to prepare for something instead of going down with just confidence

D: teaching them what you need to teach them but also showing them different ways and always keeping in mind and letting them know that there is a method to your madness because some guys go in and they will express something to their kids or to some kids, they will think that the way that they are doing it their kid will understand at the end, but sometimes its just not that way. So that's like my vision, like always being consistent, you have to be consistent whether it's with your presence or with your lessons that you are teaching

D: I'm strict, you know, I'm strict especially when it comes to T. you know... my daughter...she is younger, but when it comes to T I'm strict you know, there is some things I am just not going to tolerate, you know. Education is most definitely probably the most important thing that he has to put forth in his life, you know, wrestling, videos games, all of that, that can come later. My motto to him is "do what you are supposed to do, and if you do it, you know, if you do what you're suppose to do, then you can do what you want to do but most definitely you have to do what you're suppose to do." So, he understands... He probably wishes that I wasn't so strict compared to his mom, she is really not that strict, she tries to be his friend and so forth and I notice that there is not a lot of respect there for her.

## **Research question #2: Narratives, voices**

### *Narratives*

#### *A tale of two fathers*

David's biological parents separated at the time of his birth. The absence of his biological father was filled from early on by the presence of his stepfather, who became a role model, an important male figure during the first ten years of David's life. It was presence and the "hunger" of David as a child that assigned the father role to his stepfather: "I would always go to him for advice. I never really went to my dad for advice, because he wasn't around." David's stepfather hung himself when David was about ten/eleven years old, apparently as a result of relationship problems between him and David's mother ("he killed himself because he felt like... you know...my mom was the only woman that he wanted to be with and she wasn't in the same place as him.") David's stepfather's suicide was devastating and left David to grow up from then on without a male figure regularly present in the household. Years later, with the birth of his first son, David reconnected with his biological father, who would become an important figure from then on in his life. David explained that although their relationship had never been horrible, it had always been distant:

D: Now the relationship that I have with my dad is great. But it didn't come until I let him know how absent he was and him listening, and him understanding and you know, this was around the time that T. was, you know, on his way here, so you know now that he's here and now that I have kids, he sees how dedicated I am like you know, my kids comes first. So, me and him have a way better relationship... you know, not that it was a terrible relationship, but it was just a

distant relationship. But now, we are very close, we speak on the phone almost everyday.

David reported that both his stepfather and his father taught him the lesson of “strength” although each in a different way. Here again it is presence that determines the more powerful lesson. David states that his biological father “told” him to be strong, but because he wasn’t around he was never able to elaborate any further so the lesson and its meaning was partly lost. His stepfather, on the other hand, “showed” him how to be strong, a lesson that remained with him for life:

D: Well...my stepdad's definition of strong came off of action, as seen in, you know, his strength – his strength lied in... in protecting family by any means necessary. My dad's strength possibly meant not being afraid of things... Being strong in regards to standing up to whatever affairs, you... you have to overcome... being strong in that way, overcoming things. So I don't, you know, like I said... I can't tell you for a fact if they both had the same idea, or if... if that's, the whole nucleus of strong based on what two men thought.

SC: So what you got from both was that it was important. But the lesson that really stayed with you was your stepfather's...

D: Yes... because it was more of a... hands on, more of a, I will show you better than I can tell you, where my dad told me but he didn't show me.

David’s understandings of responsibility and fatherhood and clearly more heavily grounded on the direct lessons taught by his stepfather than those taught by his father. Developmentally, presence and the idea of protecting the family from a menacing world are the indelible responsible fatherhood marks of David’s stepfather. Over the interview,

David made it a point a couple of times to highlight the importance of what he called the “negative” lessons in life, those that come from negative experiences. Despite their later reconciliation, it is here that David’s biological father’s contribution seems strongest, as his absence and its impact in David’s upbringing reinforced again the importance of presence as a key aspect of responsible fatherhood. David’s stepfather’s suicide on the other hand did not seem to affect the power of the lessons he left behind, perhaps because David’s mother had already separated from him, making it virtually impossible for him to be present or protect his family in anyway, and therefore safeguarding his lessons from any further scrutiny.

### *Hustling*

“Hustling,” a term used by David primarily to refer to the activities involved in selling drugs, is the key word at the center of another important narrative impacting David’s understanding of responsible fatherhood. David situates hustling as one of the main enemies of responsible fatherhood practices within black communities, not only in its threats to fathers’ presence overall (because of possible incarceration or violent death of the father), but also in its overall impact on the community. David acknowledged having been a hustler in his younger years, although he reported he was able to leave that life behind before it impacted his life as a father. Despite David clearly rejecting hustling as a way of life during the interview, there is also a trace of pride when he thinks of his own past potential as a hustler:

D: [...] Crack cocaine, heroin, so on a so forth, those are what, you know, mess up the home and drive a wedge through families.

SC: Did it in yours?

D: It did not in mine, which was a beautiful thing that it didn't, because I could have been, I easily could have been a top drug dealer... easily. But morally it wasn't right, because I looked at the bigger picture, I looked at the "someone has to suffer" aspect of that... going up to people's houses seeing that there were kids suffering, there were, you know, how people were suffering based on the fact that there were dads that decided, you know, "I'm going to sell crack"

David makes the decision not to hustle based partly on morality, even if, as an activity, hustling offers rewards. In the excerpt below we are able to further see the power of hustling not only as a way of earning a living, but also as a way to earn respect and admiration within communities where there may be few or no other ways to do so. At the core of the motivation to hustle for David are the ideas of wanting to be "fly" and "trying to keep up with the Joneses" –that is, the desire to be admired, on the one hand, and competing with other members in the community for material possessions on the other. David associates both of these with "black culture" in a statement that in its factual essentialism eliminates –or, at the very least, ignores or is unaware of– other explanatory narratives for the motivational forces behind a hustling economy (for example, capitalism in general and the values it engenders) making them instead an essential aspect of blackness. It is an explanation that walks a thin line between culture and structure. The motivational roots for a hustle economy can be found within "black culture," the hustling itself is the result of the lack of other economic options available to channel that motivation.

D: being "fly" is...um, that is just black's culture. The whole statement "trying to keep up with the Joneses" is a black statement. When you are doing this, you've

got to be – Well, nine times out of ten, if you are trying to be that dude –that’s what they’re considered, that dude- there is only really one way to do it in a black community, and that is to hustle.

Race, for David, plays a major role within the hustling narrative, a role that goes beyond providing the motivational fuel for the hustling activity itself. Being black increases the likelihood of being harassed regularly by the police task force (particularly the ATF), both because the police task force’s racial composition is predominantly white –a statement that associates lack of diversity with racism and stereotyping– and because being black itself is often enough of a sign for police officers that a man is “up to no good.” The police officer’s knowledge of black men’s “short tempers” facilitates an arrest even when the individual is innocent of any wrong doing:

D: when I say it plays a major part it's because in my 31 years that I've been alive, living in poverty stricken areas, the ones that do most of the harassing isn't the plain clothes, uniform cops...it's the task force, it's the ATF. And 99% of them are not black and race plays a factor. No one can tell me that race doesn't play a factor because I've been in situations where they looked at me like “you're black, so you are up to no good.” Until I tell them, "I'm clean as whistle baby” You know what I'm saying? and they still found ways to get under your skin because they know blacks have short tempers. So they keep working you and working you and that's what normally happens.

Both being black and hustling increase the threat to a father’s presence in the life of a child, and therefore to responsible fatherhood. In David’s narrative the threat is an ever-present aspect of life in the “hood,” whether one participates actively in hustling



activities or not, as merely having friends who hustle or have hustled presents a threat of incarceration. As the excerpt below shows, in areas where hustling is one of the main sources of income, getting distance from illegal activities may be a luxury difficult to attain, and often proximity to a crime is all it takes for an arrest. Within this context innocence when arrested is also usually irrelevant, as the price of freedom then – “snitching” on the guilty party– is in fact not a choice between jail and freedom, but between jail and death:

D: police come, somebody got to take claim for whatever is lying on this ground, and it just happens to be closer to the person that has never touched it before. Cant't snitch... so you got to take the hit. You take the hit and now you are going down. Same thing with parole. You want to stay away from them kind of people. But how many people in the hood can anybody honestly say they report, “Hey listen, I know you just got on parole, so I'm not even going to come around you because I have this gun on me because people don't like me. So they want to kill me and I rather be judged by 12 than carried by 6, you do understand?” Doesn't happen. So now, the police are coming again and your sole friend got around and he had crack cocaine or had a gun on him. Now you are not allowed to be around none of that kind of stuff, so where are you going back to? Going back to jail.

The hustling narrative reinforces David's understanding of responsible fatherhood as necessary within a menacing, dangerous world. Within this context the father's presence in the life of a child is vital both in its basic protection function as well as in that it helps facilitate learning how to deal with an environment that requires strength, toughness, intelligence and adaptability to navigate. Although education of the traditional

kind (math, English, etc.) is important, the lessons a father teaches –the “blueprint” for life– are what makes a difference in daily survival in the neighborhood.

*The juggernaut*

David’s experiences both as a son and within a world where hustling is embedded in regular neighborhood life helped shape his understanding of responsible fatherhood and the practices associated with it. Although David described hustling as a threat to responsible fatherhood, it is the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas (in this case of the Fifth Judicial District of Pennsylvania) that was most strongly identified with a threat to family unity and responsible fatherhood practices. Within this narrative, the word “division” of Family Division was highlighted by David (see excerpt above, under *Understandings of Responsible Fatherhood*) to mean not only a section of the Court of Common Pleas, but the actual purpose of the court itself, which, according to David, is to “divide” families. The other choice of word used by David to describe Family Division, “juggernaut”–evoking a vision of a massive, indestructible and unstoppable force– is also telling of how the entire Family Division is seen in relation to fathers and families:

D: it’s like a juggernaut like... what they say goes, you know, that’s one of those situations where is like, they have their mind made up even before you get there, that you are going to pay, that you are going to owe, and that’s you are going to continue to pay and if you don’t pay you are going to continue to owe, and if you have to continue to owe sooner or later you keep coming down here come we are going to take your freedom away from you. Regardless if you have all the proof in the world from receipts to whatever it's all irrelevant because their mind was already made up.

David relies heavily on his own experiences in court to ground his understanding of the impact of family court on the ability of fathers to be responsible. David was taken to family court by his girlfriend after the birth of his son. It is clear from the interview that David thought at the time he was meeting the obligations expected of a father, and was actually caught by surprise and humiliated in court by a judge that found him lacking as a father.

D: [...] it can just be simple as, my... my situation where I feel like...you know I am doing, I am doing, what I need to do. And you go to family division and you're told you are not doing nowhere near as much as you need to do based on the fact that what she said is true and, you have to prove yourself. So you think "I give up... I am not... you know I am not dealing with this no more..."

David explained that for many fathers the experience with family court severely complicates the relationship with their children. Whatever the problems may have been that brought the family to court, the court itself only makes them worse, and the experience can be so humiliating that many fathers give up and stop trying to be present in the life of their children. Family court, within this narrative, appears as an institution biased against fathers -particularly black fathers- who in being taken to court are in a losing proposition from the very start. The black father who walks in family court as a man will walk out as a "mouse," or a deadbeat dad.

D: So whatever we tried to do to not be put in a situation, and we thought that we were doing it, until we get that letter in a mail saying that we have to report, it transforms everything. So we can think that we're doing great, it's not the best but is, you know, miles away from the worst, and you get the letter stating you

have to go down to family division, you have to, you know, sit in front of the judge, and...ultimately you will have to pay, walk in here as a man guarantees you will walk out as a mouse, because that is what a mouse is, a mouse is a deadbeat dad...

Within this picture one gets the impression that it is mainly the judge –and not the moral faults or economic struggles of fathers themselves– that turns men into deadbeat dads. Equating “mouse” to “deadbeat dad” is an illuminating metaphor that gives another glimpse into how David sees the relationship of Family Division to fathers. If a mouse is a type of vermin often chased and despised within modern homes, then deadbeat dads are portrayed here as the vermin of Family Division. Being black and a male within this narrative increases the risk of being turned into a mouse, as black men have both their gender and their race working against them.

D: once these applications are being submitted into family division you know of course you fill out the information and on pretty much any application it asks what your race is, and it's like... after a while you don't have a person with a fair mind saying another male... now they are putting more into it...like another black male. You know and again looking into where they are residing at...another black male, another black woman, black community...

Ultimately, and although Family Division is the identified villain within this narrative, its entrance as an enforcer into family life is regulated by women who often use children to penalize men. Women may take the children away or go to Family Division just because of a disagreement.

S: You mentioned also that the man is not performing his family obligations, and

so the partner, the woman -married or not- says you are not... you know... takes child away or something

D: Right...and it doesn't even have to be that they are not performing in their family, it can be something as simple as... because of a disagreement, because the first thing that a woman does whenever there is an altercation between the mother and father is to take the kid away. So that's the first thing that they will do, they will most definitely try to take the kid away to penalize the man. And this is probably one of that, this is probably one of the biggest ones, even though family division is...

S: a-ha...That was the third one.

D: That is the third. Family Division is probably the top one...

Women within this narrative are guided by emotions, and as a result fabricate and exaggerate and are not ultimately entirely aware of the consequences of their actions.

When they open the doors to the involvement of Family Division, they are unaware that their invitation is hard to rescind later on:

D: [W]henever they get you know, whenever the mother gets you know family division involved a lot of guys throw their hands up, and they are like, "oh well, let them do what they have to do and I'll just be off somewhere." So a lot of people look at it as... This is what it is. A lot of people are getting the information from the women. So when you get the information from the women there is probably more emotions involved and I am a firm believer that when there is more emotion involved and lot of things, a lot of things were fabricated, a lot of things were exaggerated and a lot of things are sold to a point where they are the

victim.

D: [J]ust like the lady said whenever we were down there because, you know, the mom was like...why he is a good guy and this and that and the third.... and the lady looked at her and was like, there is nothing you can do now, because you opened... that you opened the fly gates, you made us believe that... you know... this guy wasn't taking care of his responsibilities.

Although David himself lost his initial battle in court (which meant he had to pay child support) he was able to ultimately gain custody of his son through an apparent sleight of hand that took advantage of his girlfriend's trust, a move he justified because of the proceedings she previously started against him. Strangely enough, this final result by which David gained custody of his son—and always according to David's narrative—would place his own experience with family court as an exception to the majority of black fathers (“...there is 10% of the time they'll rule in favor of the child's father.”) Whatever the case, it is clear that Family Division in David's narrative plays the role of an institutional monster, a juggernaut which causes more problems than it solves, that is particularly biased against black fathers, and that is typically invited into family conflicts by emotional women who are often unaware of the consequences of their actions.

### *Voices*

A number of relational voices are present in David's interview, powerfully influencing his understandings of fatherhood and responsibility. Although their impact and importance can be seen at different times during the interview, if there is something that unites all of these voices it is, strangely, perhaps, their distance or absence from David's life. Be it because of death, abandonment, separation or otherwise, the most

important relational voices in David's narrative as they appear in the interview can be argued to influence David's life from afar. Although their resonance is powerfully present at different times in the narrative, the sources of the voices are distant in time, space, or both.

David's two father figures (his stepfather and his biological father) are perhaps the most salient and easily identified relational voices present in David's narrative. Their influence as voices looms large over David's views on fatherhood and responsibility. Both voices are the voices of absence, even if the way absence colors their present resonance is qualitatively different. David's biological father was absent during David's development, his voice mute, its importance and influence found mainly in its silence. Although David reconnected with his father later on in life, as a voice its power is found in his earlier absence and its damaging effect on David's life. The voice's only material words according to David –its lesson of strength– sound vacuous and empty because of absence and the inability of David's biological father to explain its meaning at the time when the lesson was needed most. David's stepfather, on the other hand, was present during the first eleven years of his life, but committed suicide then; his voice frozen in time at that instant. The lessons he imparted –as a role model, on strength, on relationships– are amplified by his suicide. It is again a voice marked by absence, but in a different manner than David's biological father. Absence here strengthens a voice that was already rich before being silenced. David's relationship to this voice is one of reverence despite –or perhaps because of– suicide. It is a voice that sets the example for responsible fatherhood, a voice that speaks to him, as a father, of presence, of teaching, of strength, and of protecting the family, and does it, paradoxically, from absence.

David's mother's voice is also present in David's narrative, although not in an overtly dominant role. Her voice is surprisingly weak given the strong role she is supposed to have had in David's life. Present throughout his development, responsible for raising him and credited in the narrative for turning him into who he is today, David's mother's voice is shockingly quiet in the text. David's understanding of fatherhood and responsibility would seem therefore to owe little to his mother –according to the narrative– even if it seems as if she is the best example available of a responsible parent in his life. Given the contrast between what the narrative points to and the weight of David's mother's voice within it, it is perhaps not surprising that she is not touted as the example for the majority of women and mothers. Instead, David's ex-girlfriend (and mother of his first son), a relational voice also strongly present in his narrative although distant in David's current life, is made to represent the category of women as voice. Her voice is the voice of conflict, of antagonism. It stands as one of the reasons men struggle to be fathers. For him, women are often emotional, overreactive, and spiteful, and the best example of this is David's ex-girlfriend who, from the distance provided by the personal conflict with David, reinforces as a voice the difficulties of fathers to be fathers.

Worthy of note are also the voices that are not in the narrative as dominant voices yet seem to play important roles in his life. David's children, despite being at the center of the narrative, barely have a voice within it. They do not speak to David's understanding of fatherhood except as the object of fatherhood practices. Their voice is not active, but passive: they receive –not shape– David's understandings of fatherhood and responsibility. Finally, and in this case entirely absent from the narrative both as a voice and a character, is David's current girlfriend and mother of his daughter, her voice



completely non-existent within the narrative.

### **Research question #3: Positions**

#### ***Fatherhood***

As stated above, David's view of responsible fatherhood privileges, above everything else, presence. For David, it is the father's daily presence in the life of a child that guarantees that he will become both the main role model and most important source of information about the world. This, in turn, creates the conditions that help fathers fulfill their primary responsibility in regard to children: providing a "blueprint" for survival in a menacing, unfair world. The interpretive repertoire David pulls from in his experience of the world—a world where hustling, shootings, police harassment, incarceration and institutional racism are the norm—positions him as a responsible father. Presence, teaching how to be strong and smart, and guaranteeing safety are the trademarks of David's position as a responsible father. Absent from his narrative is any language endorsing the father as a nurturer, frolicsome or engaged in activities related to childcare, as the narrative itself precludes them from being considered essential aspects of responsible fatherhood.

The privileging of presence above everything else also reveals again a classical ideological dilemma within the responsible fatherhood field played out in David's narrative. If presence is the key aspect of responsible fatherhood, then being a provider can only be endorsed inasmuch as it doesn't conflict with the father's ability to be present in the life of the child. In an environment where good paying jobs allowing for a flexible/light work schedule are not widely available, being both regularly present and also being a provider is an unlikely scenario. Perhaps because of this, David does not

endorse the role of provider as an important aspect of responsible fatherhood. Later on in the narrative, however, –and as the excerpt below shows– David does tie a man’s worth to his ability to be a provider. This statement indicates an ideological dilemma solved linguistically within the narrative by separating the role as a father (to be present) from the role as a man (to be a provider).

D: So the black man is trying to get these jobs, and he keeps coming up empty and now his girl or his wife or his fiancé come in and says “I got a job.” (...)

What do you think that black man will feel like? He will feel like she is trying to down him and they'll get into it or whatever... and now she got her own form of income, what good is he. Because as long as you remember, the first mission that a man was to have – once he became a man– was to become a provider. Now she got a job, now she is the provider, so it’s like, what good are you?

### ***Fatherhood and race***

David’s position on race in the context of responsible fatherhood appears initially divorced from biology or essence. To be responsible as a black father is to guarantee the child’s safety and survival in a environmental context where being perceived as black often means being at an increased risk for being the target of discriminatory institutional practices, police harassment, incarceration, or death by violent means. David’s position favors a view of race where race creates additional challenges for fathers because of the social and historical consequences attached to being perceived as belonging to one race or another, not because of any essential differences between races. Although this is the position most consistently maintained throughout David’s narrative, David also surprisingly endorses in a few instances a view of blackness as being essentially

different:

SC: Um...So race plays a very important role there.

D: It plays a very important role because...we are already upset, you know we have, I mean blacks we have short tempers, you know, this is in us, we have very short tempers.

D: (...) they still found ways to get under your skin because they know blacks have short tempers. So they keep working you and working you and that's what normally happens.

That endorsement of “short temper” as an essential racial difference –something “in” black fathers as opposed to a consequence of systemic discrimination and harassment– points to an ideological dilemma in David’s narrative. Although David argues consistently that race creates additional challenges because of the nature of how race is perceived, on specific instances he also seems to instinctually endorse the “angry black man” social narrative as an essential aspect of blackness. To be black is to have a short temper, a fact that can be used against you in circumstances where race has already made you a target of discrimination.

In the debate between culture and structure in the context of responsible fatherhood, David seems to identify both cultural and structural impediments to responsible fatherhood practices, even if he seems to position himself more clearly, overall, on the side of structure. Poverty, racial discrimination, and the role of institutions such as police enforcement, the prison industrial complex, or the Family Division of the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas are all identified at one point or another as

important hurdles to responsible fatherhood practices within black communities. David endorses also cultural factors, although, as stated, less strongly so. These have to do primarily with the desire to be “fly”: a desire to be admired that is identified with black culture in the narrative and that in poor black neighborhoods can often only be satisfied through hustling, an activity credited again in the narrative for creating a range of problems for those black fathers who decide to engage in it.

SC: So what are things that get in the way of being a responsible father.

D: (exhales deeply)... One of them of course is we try to live up to whatever you try to live up to, rather as to the "flyest-guy" or...you know... the guy that has the most money, the guy that has the most females (...)

D: The one is being fly is...um, that is just black's culture. The whole statement "trying to keep up with the Jones'" is a black statement. When you are doing this, you've got to be – Well, nine times out of ten, if you are trying to be that dude – that's what they're considered, that dude- there is only really one way to do it in a black community, and that is to hustle.

### ***Fatherhood and gender***

Out of all the major themes related to responsible fatherhood, David shows the greatest ideological dilemma in relation to gender. At the core of the conflicts seem to be the examples provided by the experiences with his ex-girlfriend versus the experience with the women in his family, and the choice of the former over the latter to represent the category “women.” David positions himself often throughout his narrative as in an antagonistic relationship to women. Women chastise men by taking their children away

as soon as there is a conflict or “minor disagreement” with the father. Women are emotional and do not think about their actions, which often leads them to get family services involved when it is not necessary to do so. Women are greedy and take advantage of the system to their benefit, through child support, food stamps, etc. Women are also the beneficiaries of stereotypes affecting both black men and women on the job hunt, by which black women are often seen as more intelligent than black men. Yet when describing his own mother, David states:

D: Me and my mom...if it wasn't for my mom I would have dropped out of school and so on and so forth, so my mom was most definitely my biggest supporter, being that there wasn't a assistant male, i.e. my father or my step dad, you know, that I was born into - in my life I found myself always cutting up so I was always in trouble. (...) My mom volunteered, since I was in pre-school with me and my brother and my sister so I do it. You know, I've been volunteering for quite sometime. So I tried to let them see my accomplishments in regard to helping others as much as I can, especially my mom because out of her three kids I was the problem child.

Similarly, when speaking of the women in his family, David again credits them for their strength:

D: I would say the strength part but then again, I know a lot of strong...almost every single one of my family members -female family members- are like, extremely strong.

The picture of women we get from the descriptions of women in his family is very different than the statements aimed at women in general. This lived ideological

dilemma is maintained, it would seem, through a differentiation between women in his family and the women outside of his family. This allows him to maintain a drastic position in regards to women in general while also safeguarding women within his family from his own criticism.

David is also much kinder with men than with women. Fathers, particularly, are pictured mainly as the victims both of women who are overemotional and do not think about the consequences of their actions, and of a system stacked against them from the start. Although David takes the position that fatherhood is a choice, he makes little of men who choose not to be fathers for the children they bring into the world. Their choice to not take on the father-role seems at times in his narrative to be the fault of women (who push them away) more than of the men themselves. However, when speaking of his own biological father, David points out how problematic his choice to not be there for him was, and clearly blames him and not his mother for his absence, pointing to another lived ideological dilemma.

D: Now the relationship that I have with my dad is great. But it didn't come until I let him know how absent he was and him listening, and him understanding (...)

Finally, David's position on marriage is the clearest of all the major themes analyzed here. Having never been married, and not planning to marry, David's position on marriage –that he does not think that marriage is a necessary element for responsible fatherhood– is supported by his own personal experience and seems free of conflict. Marriage, for David, is unimportant, and can at times in fact create more problems than being unmarried. It is the quality of the relationship, not marriage, that makes a difference.

David: To me it's like... I don't know. When it comes to marriage, to me is not a pressing issue. The most important thing is getting along, and if you're not, for the sake of the children agree to disagree and keep them moving. (...) As long as you can maintain a healthy relationship, a healthy environment, going by law if you're together long enough, you're legally married anyway, so why do this whole song and dance that a lot of times it ends up in a disappointed finish.

### **Overall Summary**

David's understanding of fatherhood is based on choice, not biology. A man is a father because of a combined decision involving a child who is "hungry" and seeking information, and a man who decides to be present in his life and to teach him. Teaching involves providing a "blueprint" for life, being a role model, providing information about the world and disciplining the child when necessary. Responsibility within this context is understood as relational. To be responsible is to respond to the child in a way that both claims him/her, and is, at the same time, claimed by the child. The nature of this responsibility is not based on a moral code, but on a highly contextual and adaptive one: to be responsible for another is to help guide them through a dangerous unpredictable world that requires particular skills to survive. Being a responsible father within this world requires above all guaranteeing one's presence in the life of the child, as presence can help assure that the child does not get information that may be detrimental for him in the long term.

David's understanding of responsible fatherhood has to be situated within several parallel narratives. On the one hand, the contrast provided during his childhood by the absence of his biological father versus the presence and later suicide of his stepfather

helps reinforce the importance of father presence in the life of a child. Similarly, the role of hustling and its consequences for inner city black communities provides a backdrop on which to situate David's understanding of the world as threatening and dangerous.

Finally, the narrative detailing David's struggle to gain custody of his children paints a picture of the role of family court as an institutional monster, particularly biased against black fathers and that serves primarily to divide families, not bring them together.

Several important relational voices are present within David's narrative. David's biological father is the voice of absence, its power found in its early damaging effect in David's life. David's stepfather's voice, although also paradoxically marked by absence, represents the other side of the coin, the ideal father: present, strong, and protective.

David's mother's voice is also present, yet, despite her major role in David's development, she is surprisingly quiet as a voice, her influence next to null in his overall understandings of responsible fatherhood. As a contrast, the voice of David's ex-girlfriend and mother of his son is strong. She is the voice of conflict and antagonism, made to stand for the category "women" in the narrative. Surprisingly absent from the narrative as voices are the voices of his children and his current girlfriend.

David's positions on responsibility, race, or gender pointed to a few dilemmas. Although, for example, David highlighted presence as the cornerstone of responsible fatherhood, later on in the narrative he states that being a provider is the "first mission" of a man. In an environment in which one's ability to be a provider is often inversely related to presence in the household, holding both views indicates a conflict solved linguistically in the narrative through separating the role as a father (presence) to the role as a man (provider). David also seems to endorse a non-essential understanding of race where what



makes a difference is the perception of race. Yet several times in the narrative David points to “short-temper” as an essential aspect of blackness (“it is in us”), indicating he is also endorsing an essential view of differences between races. Finally, and as with Bertrand, David’ strongest ideological dilemma is provided by his views of gender. David positions himself throughout the narrative in an antagonistic relationship with women, who are portrayed as emotional, greedy, punishing towards men and opportunistic with the system, which they manipulate to their advantage. Yet David also safeguards the women from within his family, particularly his mother, from such criticism, portraying them as strong, and in the case of his mother, altruistic and committed to his well-being.

The interview and reflexive reading highlight the contrast between my impressions of David prior to the interview and the personal impact his narrative had on me. The reflexive reading particularly highlights how David’s narrative as a son, the contrast between his biological father and his stepfather, and the tragedy surrounding the latter, created a moment of deep empathy and connection in the interview. The contrast between both of our backgrounds and experiences, highlighted the differences between us while opening a different world experientially for me, a world that allowed me, even when I did not share his positions, to understand empathically how he got to them.

## **Hunter**

### **Introduction**

Hunter was a 59 year old mechanic by trade, a father of five children (three different mothers) who became interested in fatherhood and issues related to responsible fatherhood after the birth of his youngest two children (twins) ten years before the

interview. Hunter was a constant at group meetings. Even when I arrived very early, he was always already there. A small man with dreadlocks and a youthful appearance despite his age, he was a fast, loud speaker, always making jokes and laughing at people's stories. I often spoke to Hunter before groups; we would chat about either his youngest son or my eldest. The weight of his son was a frequent topic, a source of both pride (he had to play football with older kids, as he was too big to play with kids his age) and worry (there were health risk factors associated with it, and the doctors had designed a plan to help him lose weight). We also often spoke of my son. During one of the first father events I attended, I spent most of the day running after my son, then 4 or 5 years of age. Hunter told me after with a smile that I needed to give him some freedom and let him run. I would only realize later exactly what he meant. We were at a father event with mostly men who knew each other quite well. Everyone there took care of everyone's children. I had been the only one running after my own child all day.

I met Hunter for this interview at his house in Pittsburgh's Hill District after several failed attempts to schedule a meeting (Hunter had been forward in wanting to participate and be interviewed, but we had struggled after that for a couple of weeks to find a place and a time to meet). The interview itself was conducted while he worked on the engine of a relatively new Mercedes Benz outside of his house, with the engine open, my digital recorders set on top of different engine parts and me sitting on a chair by Hunter while he worked assiduously on the engine. Hunter had explained to me he had worked at an auto shop in the past for a while, but was now fixing cars from his house and getting paid in cash. Although the setting was noisy and not ideal for an interview, I knew because of our difficulties finding a time to meet over the previous two weeks that

he was extremely busy, and this was probably the only way I was going to be able to catch him at one place for an extended period. The interview itself lasted about 50 minutes –the shortest of all the interviews here– although at the time it felt like it had taken longer, perhaps because of the unusual setting and numerous distractions.

#### **Reflexive reading summary<sup>4</sup>**

The interview and consequent reflexive reading revealed two main reactions to the text. First, the interview elicited a deep appreciation for Hunter and his personal story as a father. As stated above, I had spoken with Hunter many times before we ever met for the interview, yet he had never told me his personal story, his struggle with substance abuse, his absence from the lives of his first three children, or his efforts as a single father with his twins. Hunter looked and acted younger than he was; yet he had obviously lived through a lot. The way his eyes lit up at the end of the interview while remembering the moment his first son was born was moving. Although he wasn't present in the life of his first three kids, since the birth of his twins he had been trying to make up by being there for them. The story of his troubled journey to responsible fatherhood was unexpected, and gave me a deeper understanding of who he was as a father. The reflexive reading, however, also shows the ways in which our views differed on several issues, as evidenced, primarily, by Hunter's tendency to tilt blame of most problems related to responsible fatherhood toward mothers. Hunter spoke against domestic violence while associating it with single motherhood. He blamed both mothers and fathers for father absence, yet also implied that women are the gatekeepers of father's involvement. He stated that drugs were only an issue primarily with pregnant women who used drugs,

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C for the full reflexive reading of Hunter's interview

rejecting the idea that the struggles he went through with drugs could be generalized to other fathers. Although none of these positions were a surprise (I had heard Hunter speak to a few of them during groups) they still provided clear points of divergence between us that became evident in the reflexive reading.

### **Research question #1: Fatherhood and responsibility**

#### ***Understanding of fatherhood***

Hunter's understanding of fatherhood is grounded on biology. In his case, however, biology seems to serve primarily the purpose of granting rights over the children to the father, and does not in itself create the conditions for a different type of relationship with the child. Extended family, stepfathers, or other members of the community can raise a child, and therefore be a father, just as well as a biological father can. Hunter, for example, explains how when his mum and his dad separated, the community helped raise him:

H: I stayed in contact with my dad, but like I said, we had the community to help raise us. So if you go down the street, and you doing something you had no business doing, you got chastised from down the street, all the way back up til you go to your house. You know, and like I said, I was lucky, always, you know, you can say loved or gifted, but as a little child, I would go around doing bad things - vandalizing guys cars and what not. A guy caught me by the seat of my pants, and told me like, you gonna start fixing everything you tore up. This was a guy that cared, taught me responsibility, like, "hey why going around tearing up something that don't belong to you?" So, you know, he showed me how to be a mechanic...

Although social fatherhood played a major role in Hunter's upbringing, he sees the biological father's presence and engagement in the life of a child as the best case scenario. The absence of the biological father creates additional challenges and complicates things. Another man can always take the role of the father, but –as the excerpt above also shows– he must “care” enough to do so, something which often is not the case:

SC: And that would be raised...growing up without a...

H: Without a father... With somebody else trying to be the father. And nine times out of ten they are like, you know "I'm just here for her...I'm not really here for the package that comes with it, you know, cause I got my own little kids over here somewhere, you know."

SC: You think it is tougher for somebody to fulfill the role of a father who is not the biological father. Like for somebody to be a stepfather, it makes it tougher?

H: Yes and no. You have some guys that really care, you know what I mean? You know...like "I am into this young lady and I got to be into her kids" You know what I mean. But a lot of guys don't go in looking at it like that...

### ***Understanding of responsible fatherhood***

Hunter's understanding of responsibility is deeply intertwined with a sense of community. Although having a biological relationship or being a social father may add different connotations to responsibility itself, for Hunter the responsibility of raising a child lies in the community. As the two excerpts below show, Hunter keeps going back to, at different points in the interview, to the idea that it is the community as a whole that does not “care” enough, that is not involved enough in raising children:

SC: So, it's like you said, it takes a little bit, it's a community thing - it takes a village.

H: It takes a village to raise a child; if you don't have that or like I said, somebody doesn't want to lend a hand, if you see somebody's child out there doing something wrong, you need to say something, know what I mean.

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H: (...) It's just a caring for what you see. We have a lack of caring in the black community for what a child do or do not do compared to the rest of society.

Hunter highlights primarily four aspects of responsible fatherhood in the interview: presence, engagement, teaching and being a role model. To be a responsible father one must be present and engaged in the life of a child. Hunter makes the case for presence and engagement in opposition to financial responsibility. Although financial responsibility is a part of fatherhood, it cannot come at the cost of presence and engagement with a child:

H: (...) You know if you financially supply for your kids you feel that is your obligation, which it is not. You know, that is where a lot of young men is missing the point.

SC: So for you responsibility is not financial.

Hunter: financial it is not... it's more like spending quality time to a kid. I mean financially is part of the necessity of raising kids, raising a family, but quality time is the most important thing, you know what I mean. you know you spend with a kid. teaching them the values the things you want them to have and do in the right way. you know (...)

Engagement takes presence further than simply being regularly present. It is “spending quality time,” which may involve things such as “going to the barber shop with your kid, going to the park, you know going out making a family dinner.” Teaching is also important. The importance of teaching as an activity essential to fatherhood is formulated in the context of teaching children how to be adults. The values and experiences taught, however, have to be situated within a larger frame of what is right and what is wrong:

SC: So it is, umm, it is not merely being present, being there everyday, it is also teaching them.

Hunter: Teaching them, yes.

SC: Teaching them, from the beginning what is right, what is wrong, according to you and your experience?

Hunter: Yeah, yeah, my experience, or you know, or in general, you know, what society expect out of you as a child, Raising up to an adult; because if you teach your child the wrong way of becoming an adult, this is what they expect.

Finally, being a responsible father also involves being a role model, as without good role models kids just “idolize what they see,” and end up on the wrong path:

Hunter: To be a role model, that is the lack of what young men are, you know, not trying to be a responsible role model to the youths that are coming up. You know these babies, only idolize what they see, if you set that trend for them, this is the trend that they go by. If you want to run around calling your mother and women, you know, bitches all day long, this is what they feel that they need to do. Instead of showing them what really is responsible, you know what I mean (...)

## **Research question #2: Narratives, voices**

### *Narratives*

#### *The long journey to responsible fatherhood*

The single most powerful narrative in Hunter's interview is the story of how he himself came to become a responsible father. Hunter came from a large family, being one of nine brothers and sisters. Although Hunter initially stated that he had a father and a mother growing up during part of his childhood, by the time he had hit early adolescence his parents had separated and his mother was struggling with five kids at home. Hunter stated the community helped her raise them, although in his case the departure of his father also meant he began getting involved in illegal activities such as vandalizing cars and, finally, drug use:

SC: How...what were you addicted to?

H: I was, uhhh, cocaine, dope, you know, drinking, marihuana... I used all of the above, know what I mean, and, like I said, you know, you took institutional, to give me another chance, you know, around life, know what I mean. You know, I closed a lot of bridges when I was actively using, not seeing my kids, you know, the mamas didn't really want you around, looking or acting the way you were.

Umm, my family, kind of, you know, shunned me away. You know what I mean, but once I turned my life over, you know, I have had opportunities that normal people beg to have.

Hunter has had, overall, children from three different women, and he differentiates between his relationship with the children from his first two relationships from those from the last one. Although Hunter stated proudly he was there for the birth of



his first son (“I can tell you exactly the day, the time and the weight of my first son. I was there. Thirty five years ago. It was right after monday football game, 5:45 in the morning, he weighed 7,01...” he was irregularly present in the lives of all his elder children (those from his first two relationships) from then on, the drugs getting in the way of fully engaging with them.

SC: And, from your own experience, you mentioned, drugs getting in the way of you being able to be a responsible father in a way...

H: Yeah, it kept me being you know, immature, childish, and not knowing what responsibility was. I mean, I worked, got money, you know, instead of going home to make sure my kids needed something or they go out; as soon as I got paid, I seen the drug guy right over here. So, by the time I get home, I really don't have no money, like, well, why you go to work? At the next day, I am going back to work borrowing money off somebody because I used all my up the night before you know, on something that was no good for me. What did it get me, but a lot more misery than what I had started out with, you know? And as the saying go, misery loves company, you know, so if you provide you know to that type of lifestyle, all it is just misery adding to misery.

By the time Hunter had his last set of kids (twins) he was clean of drugs. The mother, institutionalized, could not take care of them, so Hunter found himself with two babies and no partner to help raise them (“the mother's been in and out the kids' life, they see her, know what I mean, like I said, that's another scripture, that's another page, because she's still caught up in life's, you know, mishaps...”) Hunter speaks of a second chance, and all the challenges and difficulties he went through in suddenly having to be a

responsible father:

Hunter: Well, I got a chance, I got a second chance. Like I said, I was there for my older kids, but I wasn't there. I forgot it, you know, I did, but I didn't spend a quality set of time, with my older set of kids. With my younger kids, I had a chance because like here it is, you know, I got strapped with some young kids from day one you know, coming out of the hospital, taking care of them.

Somebody had to be responsible for making sure they survive in life. And, you know, like I didn't know the first thing about what it was to become a responsible father, young black man, taking care of kids. You know, I struggled everyday, trying to take care of myself. You know, what clothes to put on, you know what I mean, everyday, getting in the bath, know what I mean, everyday, you know, school wise, know what I mean, you know, what I had to do to get them in school, getting involved in the school thing, you know, that, that, came as a learning experience to me this is why, like I said, you know, young men are missing out on the most valuable thing of raising their kids, is quality time with them.

In following this narrative it becomes clear that although Hunter's overt argument was that he had to save his children from being put into foster care, the underlying story is that of him being "saved" by his twins. Hunter's birth of responsibility, then, is the result of having to take care of two children, two children who represented a second chance in life for him:

SC: What made you take... You said you took your son and daughter from the hospital. What made you make that decision then? I mean, before you were doing drugs and...

H: Well, I was clean by the time I took my kids. The mum was institutionalized so either you let society take the kids...because you can't raise them in a institution, or the other parent has to step up. And I did. And I don't regret it for a second... It was a second chance. To do something more positive in my life.

### *Voices*

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about Hunter's interview is the lack of dominant relational voices within it. Hunter's parents, his extended family, his ex-girlfriends and even his current girlfriend have muted, if not absent, voices within his story. Hunter, in fact, relies very little on relational voices to speak of responsible fatherhood. Although he mentions specific people within his family quite often, their function within the narrative is descriptive, used only to provide details within a story, not to speak for particular positions or to introduce influences within his views. They are present within the narrative as reference points, not as voices. An exception to this is perhaps the voice of his twins, which appears often throughout the narrative. Their voice represents the call to responsibility and engagement, even if their voice is the voice of childhood. At the most basic, concrete level, Hunter's twins speak of the traditional wants of children for things, and their voice allows, in turn, for Hunter to speak of his own approach to responsible fatherhood, setting limits while simultaneously engaging with them and satisfying their wants:

H: My first experience taking my daughter to the beauty salon , you know was an experiment to me to go through what she had to go through and she was well pleased, you know what I mean, looking forward to now it's like not a big hassle that she has to go to the beauty salon. With my son, you know, his first hair cut,

now it's you know, it's the fads, dad, can I get my hair cut this way, and this, that, and there, and it's like, oh no, you are too young, but you know, he sees other images and he want to portray, but I am like, no this is not you yet. Yeah, you know, because he's too young, so you have to like know what is good for your child because everybody is walking with the sag, little kids want to imitate the sag. That's not it. You know what I mean? So if you teach your kid, you know, as they come up to be a young lady, a young man, the right way and not want to be thuggish, you know what I mean? Cause if you let it go on it's get out of control and it's hard to put that rein on it.

The only other relational voice, beyond his twins, that carries some weight within Hunter's narrative is the voice from the man who taught him to be a mechanic in his youth, forcing him to fix all the cars that he had vandalized. His voice is the voice of the community, of the social father that cares. As a voice, it is only briefly present, but its power is obvious in the narrative. It stands for the way men in the community should be, men who care for all the children in the neighborhood and step up when needed to help raise them even if they are not their own. It is the voice of the visible, present father in the life of the neighborhood. In a way, it is a voice that stands for how Hunter sees himself:

Hunter: I go out to games... The little guys see me, they know "Hey, that is H. 'Jrs dad" you know, they know who I am. Even when I come into places "That is H. 'Jr. 's dad." So, you know, it's not like they don't know who I am. They know who I am because I am involved with my kid. You go down the street and you don't know whose child that is. We go down the street and believe me, they can tell

you...they know who we are.

### **Research Question #3: Positions**

#### ***Fatherhood***

Although Hunter privileged the biological link of father and child when speaking of fatherhood, it is clear also from his narrative that he considers social fatherhood just as or more important in some cases than biology (“...it takes a village to raise a child.”). Hunter’s position in this regard seems to be that to be a father is to be so biologically, even if in practice children need both biological and social fathers in their lives. Hunter also addressed the debate of presence versus provider responsible fatherhood as soon as the interview began, positioning himself clearly on the side of presence (“...financial it is not. It is more like spending quality time to a kid”). He acknowledged that being a provider is an important part of raising a child, but privileged the presence and engagement of the father over his ability to provide. Although his statements in this regard are clear, he never addresses the challenges that guaranteeing presence may pose for fathers for whom sufficient income to survive may come only through holding several jobs and/or spending long hours at work. The impression we are left with, then, is that the presence vs. provider tension –which he highlights– is in his mind a matter of father choice and not of economic circumstance (“You know if you financially supply for your kids you feel that is your obligation, which it is not. You know, that is where a lot of young men is missing the point.”)

#### ***Fatherhood and race***

Out of all the topics explored, Hunter struggled most in relation to race, providing a range of explanations –at times conflicting– for father absence within black

communities. Hunter seemed to support overall a social constructionist vision of race, rarely suggesting there are essential, biological differences between races. When asked directly if he thought race played a factor in responsible fatherhood, he assertively stated: “It doesn’t.” Yet Hunter also struggled with explaining father absence within black communities. He drew from a wide range of narratives in somewhat disorganized fashion, struggling to bring them together in a coherent explanation. Initially, he pointed, in a circular argument, to the intergenerational effects of having been raised without fathers as the main reason that fathers are absent from many homes:

H: [...] What it is a lot of guys have never been fathered to, so how can they be a father too. You know, they don't know what the responsibility is to be you know, a caring person, when a lot of times they come from a broken home, and they have to think for themselves, so they keeping going through life fending for themselves but not for somebody else. I got mine's, you get yours, you know, they got that attitude you know what I mean.

Hunter also pointed first briefly to structural factors such as lack of support, jobs or education as impediments to responsible fatherhood within black communities, but beyond briefly mentioning these, he did not explore structural factors any further, zeroing in instead on the conflict between couples and pointing specifically to women as the gatekeepers and main culprits of father absence:

H: I, lack of, I guess, support, jobs, know what I mean, education, and then, like I said, a lot of them are being mislabeled by the division, know what I mean. I know it takes two people to make a child, but, you know, it's always the woman that has a child, and if she don't want to let the man be bothered with the child,

then, like, he goes his own way. Then this child grows up; it's like a double edge sword, you know, even though they are not together, you know, he might be with some other woman, and the girl's mad, so she don't let the father see the child. He gets the attitude, so "what? ok, forget it."

Hunter also provided conflicting historical explanations for father absence within black communities, pointing first to a supposed lack of cultural family orientation within black communities in comparison to other ethnicities (this is perhaps the only point in which Hunter's explanation borders an essentialist one):

H: The majority of white and Indians and stuff they always have been family oriented. It's been passed down. This is what dads do because my dad's been there. Take my son by the hand and go out on the field and spend that quality time together. Like I say...us black have not had that and *we do not do that*. There is a handful that do, spend that time as a little kid coming up every weekend, me and my kid, or every day there is something out the blue we going to do. You know... we have a ritual routine. A lot of young men don't have that. A lot of black men don't do that. (italics added)

Shortly after, Hunter provides the opposite argument. Historically black communities were oriented towards traditional family formations but with time they broke down, and now it is happening to families of all races or ethnicities. The problem with black communities specifically is a lack of community caring for what they see.

Hunter: It's just different. The blacks...like I said, we were couples. We were all raised that way. My grandparents and great grandparents were always together. Families, you know what I mean. So, we were raised up that way, we know what

it is. But then we started getting that separate families and the majority of it is black. But now it is beginning to get both sided, it is not like...I'm just saying now you have a lot of white kids being raised by their grandmothers, by their mothers and their run amok. But when you have the unity of both parents or somebody that do care the child does better. So you can't say it's a difference between... It's just a caring for what you see. We have a lack of caring in the black community for what a child do or do not do compared to the rest of society.

Finally, when pushed to explain why there is a lack of caring, Hunter points to the role of society and particularly institutions in restricting forms of parental discipline, an intervention that he finds has affected more black communities than any other.

SC: Why do you think is that lack?

H: (long pause) It's kind of hard to say. I guess we as people started just giving up. And society took a lot out of us by tying our hands about if you was doing anything to a child, you are hurting a child it's child abuse. So, instead of...spoiling a...sparing a child is what society is doing, you are spoiling a child instead of sparing it. Because when the child does something wrong you can't chastise it, if you howl at it, you are abusing it, if you beat it, you are abusing it. So the average child is getting smart enough to say "Hey...child abuse," you know. And they call on you. So you have somebody else stepping in trying to raise your kid and they are not doing a great job at it

SC: When you say somebody else you are talking particularly about government and institutions.

H: Society in general... That has made a difference between what has happened in



black communities versus other communities in society even if it is beginning to happen in all communities.

Hunter struggles to find a coherent theory of why there may be increased numbers of father absence within black communities, pointing to a wide range of possible, yet also at times conflicting, explanations which tap into a wide range of common sense social themes on absent fatherhood, gender relations, and disciplining children. His position on the role of race shows also a powerful lived ideological dilemma: Hunter takes the position that race is not relevant, yet also struggles to find explanations without taking account of race as a relevant, differentiating factor.

As indicated above, Hunter's position on the role of culture versus structure in responsible fatherhood favors primarily cultural factors. Although he points to the lack of support, education, and jobs as contributing social factors to father absence, overall his explanations privilege cultural factors above everything else. Whether it is a lack of caring, lack of family structure, or couple conflict, the factors that are described in most detail as impeding responsible fatherhood within black communities have to do with cultural factors, not structural ones. The only structural factor described in some detail is a vague role of society and institutions in restricting forms of parental childhood discipline. Finally, Hunter offers also "teaching responsibility" as a possible way to address father absence, a solution which points again to cultural factors as the main source of the problem:

H: Well...Responsibility needs to be re-educated back into the school system. Set this classes aside. We need to have men come into some of these schools teaching these young men the same way they teach women...how they have these baby

classes. Bring both of them in there and have them do their seminar. Have a study of maybe young kids being married and you have to do this and that here and see how it goes, you know what I mean. Or being separated but having a child, and hold your responsibility. Do a study on that there. So maybe as they are getting into adulthood they'll know these things so they can make a better decision as a young person that improves their chances in life a little better.

SC: So you are arguing for catching them early, in school through education...

H: In education of being a responsible father. because why not prepare early? you prepare for everything else early...

### ***Fatherhood and gender***

In contrast to his position on race, where he attempts to hold on to a more constructionist view, Hunter holds an essentialist view of gender, where men and women are essentially different and have as a result of that difference different roles within a family (“there’s two different roles and you know they can't never come together because we’re very different.”) The father is needed to teach male children how to be men, and the mother is needed to teach female children how to be women. Each role cannot be fulfilled by the other gender.

SC: So for you there's a difference between what a father does and what a mother does. There's a difference between them, or can they do the same thing? Or do you need a father?

H: There’s a total difference. You need a male to teach a male how to become a man, know what I mean, cause a mother can't teach a man to become a man. He have to go by example, so he have to see what he has to walk behind. You know,

he can't walk behind a woman to become a man, you know, and vice a versa, you know, a young lady can't walk behind a man to become a woman.

The father, however, is not there simply to serve as a role model to boys, but also to teach girls how to be respected by men (it is safe to assume, although Hunter does not mention it, that the inverse scenario holds true in the case of mothers).

SC: So the role of the father is more important with boys, you think, than it is with girls

H: No, I feel it is important with both.

SC: With both.

H: Yes, you know, because, if your responsible type guy or man, in general, you want the best, for your young lady, and you definitely want the best for your son. You have to teach your son not to disrespect women, vice a versa, you got to teach your daughter not to let a man disrespect you. You know, so yes, we play both roles, but we can't do it to their fullest degree.

This view of the role of fathers and mothers within the family system makes for a highly structured common sense vision of the family system organized around gender differences. Within this vision, men growing up without fathers struggle because they have never had a male role model, so they do not know how to be men. Women raised without fathers do not know how to be respected by men. Similarly, women and men who grow within abusive households often end up abusing or being abused themselves (“a lot of young men grew up maybe in single households where their moms was always abused, you know, they feel that as they grow up that's their line to abuse women because nobody's not been near it and vice a versa”). It is here that we see another ideological

dilemma. Hunter speaks several times against gender violence in the interview, and the effect that witnessing violence can have on a child's upbringing, yet also complains about current social restrictions on corporal punishment ("Because when the child does something wrong you can't chastise it, if you howl at it, you are abusing it, if you beat it, you are abusing it...")

Although during the interview Hunter never brought up marriage as an important aspect of responsible fatherhood, it was the question of marriage that seemed to give him the most pause. Hunter clearly stated he had wanted to get married in his life before, even if it didn't work out. Having never been married, Hunter finds himself in a dilemma: if he endorses marriage as an important aspect of responsible fatherhood then his position as a responsible father, with children from three mothers and having never been married, is less clear. And yet, he sees marriage as important:

SC: What do you, so what is, is marriage do you think important in being able to be a responsible father or not?

H: Uhhh, that's an iffy question, know what I mean, like, I've been in long time relationships. And, I've, like I said, made commitments, couple, numerous times, about getting married, but it never panned out. Know what I mean, certain other things come up, know what I mean, you know, fidelity, on both sides. I was one time, she was one time, know what I mean, but no, I believe, you know that we are created to have an equal partner but I haven't found one that I, I'm compatible with, know what I mean. I'm, infatuated the relationship I have now, but you know, when it comes across my heart or her heart, yes it could happen. I'm looking forward to being married; to making a better unity for my kids. You see,

like, you know, you don't have to grow up being single to be happy.

Finally, and although he himself never married, Hunter decides to endorse marriage as an important aspect to responsible fatherhood, using his family as an example of the historical and cultural importance of marriage. Marriage is important to form a strong family:

Hunter: Culturally, yes, it's important. Cause that's the way you know my grand parents were married over 60 years. You know, my mother and father, even though they separated, they stayed together till they separated, until my father died, know what I mean, they stayed together. My Aunts and Uncles, they all stayed together, you know, so yes, I believe it's important, you know, for a strong unity of family, you know, responsibility, yes, to be married.

### **Overall Summary**

Hunter's understanding of fatherhood seems to support a biological view of fatherhood, where biology serves the purpose of providing unique rights in regards to a child but it does not create the conditions for a different relationship with the child. Hunter's understanding of responsibility in relationship to fatherhood is deeply intertwined with a sense of community. Although having a biological relationship may add different connotations to responsibility, for Hunter the responsibility of raising a child lies in the community. When speaking of responsible fatherhood, Hunter highlights primarily four aspects: presence, engagement, teaching and being a role model. Of these, presence and engagement are most important, and are contrasted often with the provider role, which, Hunter argues, is often mistakenly perceived as the main aspect of responsibility by young fathers.

Hunter's understanding of responsible fatherhood must be placed in the context of his own narrative as a father. Hunter had five children from three different mothers, but did not become involved as a father until the birth of his last two children. Hunter explained that before the birth of his twins he had been addicted to drugs, an addiction that wrecked his life, landing him in jail and resulting in him being shunned by his family and the mothers of his first three children. By the time his twins were born, Hunter had managed to quit using drugs. The fact that the twins' mother was incarcerated and they had nobody to take care of them pushed him to take the role of being a single father, which changed his life. Hunter himself spoke of this change of events as a "second chance." Two voices were clearly present as voices within Hunter's narrative. First, the voice of his twins, which appeared often and which represents the wants and needs of children as well as allowing him to speak as a father. Second, the voice of the community as a responsible parent, personified in this case by the man who taught Hunter to be a mechanic when he was a child.

Hunter's positions on race, gender, and marriage reveal several ideological dilemmas. Hunter highlights the importance of father presence over his role as a financial provider, but seems to imply that the choice between one and the other rests solely on the choice of fathers and not on economic circumstance. Hunter also endorsed on the one hand an essentialist view of gender difference and a non-essential view of race. In the case of the latter he struggled to provide explanations for father absence within black communities, drawing on a few often-contradictory common-sense explanations but failing to bring them together in a coherent explanatory narrative.

The reflexive reading, finally, highlighted the power of Hunter's responsible

fatherhood narrative, his journey from drug addiction to responsible fatherhood while also revealing several differences in regard to our views on gender difference.

## **Lamar**

### **Introduction**

Lamar, a 50 year-old man with deep roots in the Pittsburgh fatherhood movement, was one of the men from the group that I had looked forward to interviewing since the early stages of this study. A father of five kids (four boys and one girl, all adults) with three women, his story as a responsible father per se does not begin until the birth of his daughter and youngest child. At the time of our meeting Lamar ran an organization for fathers and families, although a Hodgkin's lymphoma diagnosis two years earlier (in remission at the time of this interview) had limited his ability to work since.

Lamar was loud, opinionated, and deeply charismatic. He was also one of the most respected and well-known fathers inside and outside of the group. Although I didn't actually meet him until after I started regularly attending the PPSMFIP, I had read of Lamar a long time before that, when I was beginning to research the responsible fatherhood movement in the Pittsburgh area. His struggle for rights and services for himself and his daughter had been the object of several articles in the local newspapers, and his efforts on behalf of fathers had also received attention from the city, which had made him a recipient of an award for community service.

When I began volunteering with the group I was entirely unaware of Lamar's involvement with them—he was not always present at PPSMFIP meetings—so I was caught by surprise when I first saw him at a meeting. I remember approaching him and hardly being able to contain my excitement, hoping I would have the opportunity to

interview him at some point. I mentioned during our brief conversation the news articles I had read about him and the bits and pieces I knew of his history. He was surprised and flattered by my interest. At that point my study was in its infancy –a guiding interest in responsible fatherhood and a lot of jumbled-up ideas with no clear direction– so I only mentioned to him that I was researching responsible fatherhood for my graduate degree. We discussed then the possibility of talking more extensively in the future, but that opportunity did not actually materialize until I conducted the interview for this study.

When I finally began recruiting participants a couple of years later, Lamar was open and willing to be interviewed. I had seen him just a few days before at a group event for fathers, and we had gotten to talk a little bit then, primarily about matters related to the event itself. A few days later we conducted the interview at his house in Homewood. I called him upon arriving in the neighborhood to ask him about the exact location of his house (he had given me a general directions over the phone, but not an exact address) and he directed me over the phone to the exact location and an open parking spot across from it. The interview lasted almost three hours –the longest interview of all conducted for this study– and Lamar was engaged and animated throughout. Although it went extremely well and we touched on every important topic I had hoped to talk about, I remember it also as the single interview where I felt most foreign, a feeling that was the consequence of several moments during our meeting. Lamar, for example, commended me at the beginning for having the courage to meet with him in his home, and highlighted how there were not many white people who visited the area –the only example given was the owner of the gasoline station from across the street, an eastern European immigrant living in the neighborhood. Lamar also pointed out how the front door of his house had almost



been torn from its hinges a few days before in an attempted break-in (“they were lucky I wasn’t in the house at the time...I would have come out shooting”) and stated there had also been a shooting at the gas station not even a month before that. Additionally, during the interview a young black man in a hoodie came knocking on the door and briefly interrupted the meeting. Upon his return, Lamar explained that the young man was checking both on him and to see who I was, and that he had been a “shooter” in a local gang, but was now rehabilitated under his guidance. Lamar also made a comment at the end of our meeting stating that I should write about all we had talked about from the point of view of a foreigner, as that would give the narrative the distance needed for people to realize how “fucked-up” everything was. Finally, when I was leaving Lamar walked me back to my car despite my mild resistance, explaining he wanted to make sure everyone in the neighborhood knew I was with him, a moment that reminded me of the fact that he had also come out to the car to greet me when I arrived. I wondered then how safe I had been every other time I had visited the area.

### **Reflexive reading summary<sup>5</sup>**

The interview with Lamar and the reflexive reading of the transcript afterwards is unavoidably conditioned by my own assumptions prior to meeting him. I knew Lamar was a leader within the responsible fatherhood movement in Pittsburgh, and had read several articles about him, his struggles in the name of fathers, and his own fight to keep his daughter as a single father. I knew from previous interviews with him that he had strong opinions about the judicial system and family court, believing both to be biased against fathers. I also knew that his own experiences fighting for father rights at every

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix D for full reflexive reading

level and the many years of experience on father issues made him a rich source of information in a study such as this one. Because of all of this, I had looked forward to my interview with him, knowing that it would likely be both educational for me and deep in information for my work. On the “negative” side, because I knew he had fought extensively for father’s rights, and given also my experience with previous interviews, I knew that Lamar would likely hold some antagonistic views towards women –views I would not, in all likelihood, share. The interview itself was intense (Lamar was fully engaged throughout, passionately speaking about every topic we addressed) and matched all my expectations, surpassing them in some instances, as the reflexive reading shows.

The reflexive reading reveals three major themes. First, and perhaps above all emotionally, is the power of Lamar’s narrative as a father. Like some of the other fathers interviewed for this study, Lamar’s journey to responsible fatherhood is remarkable, and his struggles for his daughter once he decided to be a responsible father nothing short of heroic. I was profoundly moved and captivated at certain points in the interview by that story. Even now, for example, it is hard for me to think of any of my sons being taken away from me and put in a foster home for three months without being able to see them or comfort them. The way in which Lamar spoke of hearing his daughter but not being able to get to her, the sentence “It goes through me now,” and the obvious emotions running through him as he told of how his daughter was “kidnapped” are now attached to my image of him. The narrative itself is a Kafkian nightmare, a father’s worst fear come true. I cannot but imagine the impotence and anger he must have gone through. Similarly, during the interview his fear and anguish when speaking of cancer were palpable. It was one of the only instances during the interview where Lamar abandoned his “strong black

man” interpretive repertoire and looked vulnerable in front of me. I felt at that point also a deep sense of empathy toward him, for somebody for whom strength is so important to be struck with cancer and to observe severely ill kids in an oncology ward being stronger than him, must have been a deeply humbling moment.

The second important reflexive theme has to do with my own learning during the interview. More than any other interview during this study, my conversation with Lamar was profoundly educational. Even when I disagreed with him, I felt I was also learning. Lamar provided the best point of view of all participants on the struggles of single fathers. From his discussion of the court system, of biased language in schools or hospital or of the realities of living in a poor predominately black neighborhood like Homewood, his stories and opinions provided a lens to look through at his world unlike any in this study. The lens he provided did not mean I agreed or shared his views on everything (as can be seen in the reflexive reading) but was deeply educational nonetheless and increased at several instances my empathy for other fathers and men sharing similar circumstances.

Finally, the third reflexive theme has to do with Lamar’s positionality in regards to women and the clear patriarchal and even homophobic attitudes and opinions that at times came through in the interview. My own sensitivity to the topic made it difficult for me, at those times in which he made male chauvinist or homophobic statements, to empathize with Lamar. His comments on how homosexual couples put kids through “bullcrap” because of their homosexuality, his persistent use of the word “female” to refer to women, his statement comparing men to alpha wolves that instinctually mount those inferior to them, or his agitation when speaking of how there was nothing in him

that was “female” nor did he want anything “female,” created points of difference between us that often caused his overall message to lose power with me.

Overall, therefore, the reflexive reading highlights both the deep empathy felt at the time of the interview towards his story as a father, a sense of learning throughout the interview, and deep emotional reactions against some of his comments on gender, sexuality, and women.

### **Research question #1: Responsibility and fatherhood**

#### ***Understanding of fatherhood***

For Lamar, fatherhood describes a broad type of relationship that encompasses but is not limited to (or defined by) the biological link between a man and his progeny. A man can biologically father many children, but he does not become a father until he takes on the responsibilities and obligations that come with that designation. Similarly, a man can be father without having ever biologically fathered children by simply fulfilling the role of a father in a child’s life:

SC: There is something you told me before I even started to record on how you are father... That you are a father of 35 [children], but you fathered five children. And that gives me a clue that for you father is not biology, am I right?

L: That’s right. Being a father is not the person -- just because you can make a baby, don’t make you a father. I’m a father to many, I’m also a father to my nephews, my nieces... that didn’t have any father. So when the law had to be put down, guess where they brought them at, they brought them to me. You see what I mean? Then I’m a father to a lot of other children that never had role models, you know what I mean that -- that just came to me and just bonded with me

because of who I am and what I do, you know what I mean? So you're not just a father to your child, you're a father to all the children that surround you when we are doing events. Now you understand? Now you -- you're catching my drift— because we're proud to be, most guys can't walk the way we walk because I would get upset with you if you didn't discipline my child, if they were doing something wrong and we're fathers, it takes a village (...)

Lamar's statement "most guys can't walk the way we walk" hints at the exclusive nature and sense of pride with which he understands being a father. In Lamar's eyes the obligations and responsibilities one incurs as a father are not limited by the biological ties with a child. Once accepted, the responsibilities and obligations incurred extend to the community at large, to any other children one may encounter. Fatherhood is a social badge to be worn with pride, a badge that symbolizes a particular type of relationship of care with the community, a relationship only men can enter into. Lamar's view of fatherhood is, in fact, deeply intertwined with ideas of manhood. In an example drawn from his own experience, he ties the birth of his daughter (fifth biological child) to his own "birth" into manhood: "I became a man in 1991... The rest of the time I thought I was and I wasn't."

The link between manhood and fatherhood also highlights the importance Lamar gives to gender differences in his conceptualization of fatherhood. Motherhood is a different type of relationship, un-exchangeable with fatherhood because of essential gender differences: a man is a man, and a woman is a woman. Their essential differences—as conceptualized by Lamar—translate into different roles as parents. Lamar draws a hard essential line along gender difference that can be interpreted as an attempt to assert a

father's unique role in the development of a child, all while maintaining that both mothers and fathers are necessary:

SC: And the role that fathers play is different than the role the mother plays?

L: Extremely. I hate it when the females says, "I'm the father." I hate it when the men says it, but I can, I can deal with the men saying "I'm the mother," I can't deal with the mother aspect of it. I don't want to be a female at all. You understand what I'm saying? The hardest job in the world was being a single parent. I'm not a female. There is nothing I do female. I do not understand being a female, you understand? And I ain't going to confess to any of that other stuff. And about that bullcrap about don't put money together to pay you to talk about you... to connect with your female foot... I'm a man! How do you expect me to be a father, but you're telling me to be attached with my female side. I ain't got no female side! Period. (...)

SC: But both are necessary in your view?

L: Yes.

### ***Understanding of responsible fatherhood***

Lamar's understanding of responsibility as it relates to fatherhood is inseparable from his understanding of what it means to be a father. One becomes a father when one accepts responsibility for a child. The birth into fatherhood (and into manhood) is the birth into responsibility. Lamar himself had had four children before his daughter was born, but he ties his own entrance into manhood, fatherhood and responsibility to that moment. Before the birth of his daughter he was not responsible, not a man, and not a father, even if he had fathered four children by two other women:

L: Right, exactly. I thank her for making me a man. And I say it when I'm at speakings or things, I tell them, tell them exactly when I became a man. I was not always a man. You know what I'm saying? “Well what do you mean Mr. D.? “I became a man in 1991?”” When I had to be totally responsible for her...

The responsibility of fatherhood is not a given, but has to be learned. For Lamar, it all begins with father presence (“...to me being a responsible father is a person that can give time to his children.”) Presence in the life of a child allows for some of the other aspects of being a responsible father to be implemented. Amongst these, Lamar highlights specifically teaching and being a role model. Being a teacher goes further than regular schooling; it is providing an orientation toward a set of values, toward the community, toward the world:

L: So all the critical needs and what they need through education does not fully depend on schooling but your teaching. It's about giving back. It's about showing. You become a teacher once you become a parent. There's no way that, you know, so... when you're responsible, you are willing to teach and try to give your values, your way, your perspective

“Showing” points to the ways in which teaching is intertwined with being a role model. In the quotation below Lamar uses a moment from the Disney movie “The Lion King” to show how presence, being a role model, and teaching are all tied together.

SC: You mentioned there being a role model so part of that teaching is also being a role model.

L: Yes. Yes. Yes. it has to, you know what I mean? Mufasa had to teach Simba how to roar and how to hold his head up. He couldn't have taught him that, you

know what I mean, not being there. A lot of being responsible is just having a good attendance, being there. (...)

Lamar kept on going back to the idea of teaching “self” in the interview. The Lion King metaphor is particularly significant here. Learning how to roar and hold one’s head up resonate, as metaphors, with ideas of maleness, dominance, self-esteem, confidence and pride. The idea of “self” for Lamar is reflective of all of these concepts. Learning “self” is learning who you are and acquiring the self-esteem and confidence necessary to be a man and a father:

L: We got to teach these men self before we teach them anything. Because if we can't teach them who they are, you can't teach them nothing. And this is what these programs is about; trying to teach you self. If we teach our fathers self and confidence in them, then they'll be better fathers. So, to be a good father, you've got to truly know who you are to be a good father. So, if you ask me, out of everything that we're saying, again, what makes a better father or what makes a father is learning self. That's that answer.

Lamar also endorses other aspects of responsible fatherhood throughout the narrative, such as being a protector or a disciplinarian, although these are brought up anecdotally and are not given as much importance overall. On the other side of the coin, Lamar does not directly endorse any images associated with the frolicsome or loving father, even if, in the latter case, the love for his daughter is obviously patent in the narrative. Ultimately, for Lamar responsible fatherhood is, above all, about being present, teaching (particularly values, ethics, and “self”) and being a role model.



## **Research question #2: Narratives, voices**

### *Narratives*

#### *Being reborn*

“So my daughter, the birth of my daughter put me all on a whole different... I was reborn. I went through a metamorphosis because everything I believed wasn't true.”

The most powerful narrative in Lamar's interview is, without a doubt, that which begins with the birth of his daughter and his own parallel “birth” into responsibility and fatherhood. Lamar's daughter can be said in fact to be at the center of every narrative in the interview, as she is –beyond the inspiration for change in his personal life– also the inspiration and driving force behind all his legal and community efforts of behalf of fathers. Although Lamar had four sons before her they were barely mentioned during our meeting. Fatherhood, for Lamar, begins with the birth of his daughter T.

L: Well see when she was born, she was premature. You can put her in your hand. She was 1 pound 3 ounces so I was leaving my job at the [...] I was leaving my job, going to the hospital, putting my hand in an incubator, willing her to live. The mom never bothered with her. Then I was in the drug game a little bit, you know what I mean? I was making money at the time and she wanted me... She... When this baby... See the Lord sent me this baby and I knew that I was gonna be totally responsible for her. It was just a feeling that I had, you know what I mean?

Lamar's role as a father to his first four sons had been limited to being a provider, which he did through both a regular job at a sports arena, and drug-dealing on the side.

But the birth of his daughter changed things. Lamar stated during the interview he promised himself and his family he would quit drug dealing upon returning to Pittsburgh from a family trip to Florida. Caring for his then two-month old daughter upon his return gave him the inspiration through which to quit:

L: (...) the mom didn't wanna be a mom. She wanted me to stay in the game. She liked the money and the things that the game brought, you understand? The Lord had his hand on me and I was always thinking this is not what I wanna do anyway, you know what I mean? So it wasn't hard for me to... Quit or jump out, you know what I mean? I just had to have a purpose. The purpose came in that little bundle, you see what I mean? So I made that promise and I stopped selling drugs.

Lamar speaks of this single moment as the most important moment in his life. His desire to quit drug dealing, his daughter's condition as a premature, fragile, baby needing extensive care, and the lack of interest from the mother all contributed to push him to change his life around. But it was also the memory of his father's absence. Lamar had explained to me how he had a vivid memory of waiting for his father to show up for his graduation, and the deep disappointment that came from realizing he wasn't going to show up. The fear of becoming his own father, then, also pushed him to change:

L: Right so it was just crazy but then again it has taken me back to me not having a father and I was like "This is not going to happen." You know what I mean? So it took me back to visualizing and when I was telling you earlier while standing there and waiting for my father to come through the door. This is not going to happen. You know what I mean? So she changed my life.

Lamar's daughter, as stated, is at the center of every narrative having to do with responsible fatherhood. It is through taking care of her as a single parent that he realized how hard it was to be a stay-at-home parent. Before he had diminished the work of stay-at-home mothers, but taking care of T. changed that. And the experience prompted him to contact his ex-girlfriends to apologize:

L: When I had this small child that I had to be totally responsible for all her needs, then I learned being at home is the hardest job in the world. I called those ladies, the two females that I had babies by and apologized to them because I did not know. We have a beautiful relationship. You see what I'm saying? But I called them and told them "Wow I'm very sorry." You know what I'm mean? "I was an asshole all this time." You know what I mean? "I humbly apologize to you."

Being at home, you need to get paid for. Because when you're at home, you're the psychologist, the psychiatrist, you're the cook, you're the maid. You're the person breaking up stuff. You know what I mean? Fights with the kids or... You know what I mean? It's so much that you're doing all in one at home! I didn't know that because I was always at work. You see what I'm saying? And there was a standard I'm making the money. Things need to be in order because I always was a good provider.

Taking care of his daughter by himself also made him aware of how society was not equipped to deal with single fathers, a realization that prompted him to organize and fight for father's rights. Perhaps the most powerful, emotional moment in the interview came when Lamar spoke of having his daughter (eight years old at the time) "kidnapped" by Child and Family Services (CYF) for almost three months, after an unfortunate

misunderstanding with the school principal (she told him she was scared to go home after getting in trouble at school). Despite never finding any signs of abuse or neglect, CYF took her:

L: They kept her for three months, three months. I had to wait all that time. Now, in meantime, this child had never ever been away from me, never ever. And they wrecked her world. Now I have a child that's so defensive.(...)They kidnapped my child and they wanted me to shut up and I wouldn't shut up. You pissed me off. Do you know what I mean? And imagine being in this house without that baby, hearing her. I'm going to tell you deep stuff. Hearing her in that room but I couldn't get to her. It goes through me now. Do you hear what I'm saying to you? Because I never got the same child back, never, different child, different child. Even though they changed the laws and they did things and – you know what I mean? And they start doing things correctly, it affected my child. And she's affected to this day about this stuff. Because I didn't know what the hell they were doing to her. Do you see what I mean? I couldn't protect her.

The removal of his daughter from his home points to the most traumatic moment in Lamar's history. Although as we will see in the narrative below, he had begun fighting for fathers' rights before that, those three months strengthened his determination to continue to fight, to inform and educate fathers of their rights, to change a system he perceived as heavily favoring mothers.

### *Battling the system*

Lamar's fight to change the system began shortly after his daughter's birth and his consequent decision to become a full time father. Lamar realized quickly that society was

not equipped to deal with a single full time father. From benefits, to the hospital, to schools, to the law, Lamar was confronted with a reality where everything was oriented towards helping single mothers, not single fathers. That realization pushed him to get educated and get organized so as to be able to advocate for himself and his daughter. Lamar stated that he realized through hosting meetings that there were many other fathers in the same situation as he. What begun as a fight for himself quickly became a fight for all fathers.

L: So I start bettering myself. I started protesting. I started, back then, getting father things, trying to get father's things together. I had C. help me start and they told me to give my child to a female in order to receive benefits and I didn't think that I should have to do that. So I started crawling out to start and complaining about this atrocity (...) I mean, there's a lot of things that me and that baby changed. The hospital papers used to be biased. It used to say... You couldn't get service unless you filled out the paperwork but I never went through contractions or had any... You know what I mean? Had any of these female problems so you couldn't, you know, get seen. Well, I made sure she got seen but, you know what I mean, it was a hassle! Because the paperwork is asking me how long I've been in labor, how long I've dilated, how long... These are not questions that are purview to me. I don't need to be answering these questions so you know, through fighting with them and you know, going through different legal aspects and dealing with some of the... They changed the paperwork, you know what I mean? That's one thing I... That was the first thing that you know, the coalition did.

Despite the fact that his daughter's mother had left them and did not want any part in raising their daughter, and he was the sole provider and parent left, the state was taking all his wages from him for child support. This pushed Lamar to go to the media and to court:

L: I was working. I had this child. I was getting... Pay stubs was... Pay checks with zeroes from down at the [...] I was working all the time but they were garnishing 100% of my income. I got tapes that we were on night talk talking about it and different things like that. How do you work and you receive nothing? You know what I mean? So I basically was working for free. Then the court said to get that settled because I took it to the media because usually in the Commonwealth States, the female can go down and get a hearing [snaps fingers] legally split. You had to wait. I didn't have time to wait.

The fight over child support began a long-term fight with the courts, particularly the Family Division of the Civil Court of Pennsylvania, in behalf of himself and other fathers. Below Lamar highlights the economic interest of the courts and plays with the name of Family Division to point to his belief that they are not interested in keeping families together. He also highlights the way in which men that went through the court system were treated differently and were often unaware of how the system works, which resulted in a bad outcome for them:

L: See, I had to educate myself because I was losing the fight down there. They knew that I didn't know how to fight down there at Family Division but, then you know, I've always been an intelligent person. You look at this entity and they named it division, when they gave me a little bit of this "edumacation" here, huh?

What does division mean? It means to divide. So you never holistically had a these families' best interest at heart anyway. This is a money game. You see what I mean? They get paid for each of one of these cases down there. Why do you think they gave money? They'd get part of that money that you send in. They get it. They want your money. That's why they're so hostile down here toward you. You see what I mean? You wasn't educated. The laws was geared for the females so they didn't have to know the laws because they had attorneys! That was appointed to them! Who was fighting for men's rights? Nobody. Still there's no attorneys that fight for men's rights in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that I know of. (...) It was always unfair so you standing in front of an attorney and he's blasting you and you're sitting there like "What? What did he just say?" You know what I mean? Because you don't know. The Commonwealth gives them their attorney. So you have this male that's standing there and the only way that he is learning is through getting slashed and getting his butt whooped through the system continually doing this. And then now I got to look up stuff because I can't pay an attorney. I got children I got to support here that you're saying that I'm supporting, so I can't afford an attorney. Do you think they'll appoint me an attorney? No.

*Cancer and a founding father's legacy*

"You're talking to a founding father. I feel like George damn Washington. You know what I'm saying?"

Lamar was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma two years before his interview with me. Although at the time of the interview the cancer was in remission, it was clear

that the diagnosis had brought on a whole new set of concerns for him having to do with the future of the father movement he helped start, and what his ultimate legacy would be.

L: I understand that this is not a quick solution. This has a long-term effect here. You understand? So my job or your job is still going on. I still have the same compassion though. You see what I'm saying? My children are older now, I can just jump out of this. If I jump out now, who's going to take it? No one. That's my fear. This should not die. Never. I haven't sold out to the government. I haven't sold out to, you know, letting people take my organization or run it the way they want to. We've been very effective poor.

The fear of death that cancer brings opens the door to a whole new set of concerns having to do with fathers and health. If the main requirement for responsible fatherhood is father presence then guaranteeing the good health of fathers is a responsible fatherhood concern:

L: Well, I still have this port in my chest and I got to keep them for two years. Thank God the cancer so far is gone but you – I have read and seen some stories where people's cancer come back. Do you know what I mean? So it's not that I want to die or anything and I'll be truthful, I'm afraid to die alone. Do you know what I mean? But I don't want that no more. I believe all the medicines and the poisons that they put in my body, you know -- it woke me up. Everything has a purpose because it showed me that now that we had to be on a mission in making fathers or make sure that the young men at the middle school age start getting checkups. And once they get to the 12th grade it will be hereditary for them. You know what I mean? So we got to break the stereotype that men are – which



we were afraid through history of going to the hospitals. (...) And that was one other thing that I would want to do with the father's organization is to have fathers support the people with cancer that don't have families.

The fatherhood narrative that cancer opens up is also a wider narrative that goes beyond traditional father concerns. Being a responsible father is not simply being responsible for the next generation, for those that are sick and do not have anybody to walk with them through the medical, physical and emotional challenges brought on by cancer. Lamar spoke of the lessons learnt from his own experience, and the impact it had on his vision for the responsible father movement.

L: this cancer is killing more black people in these areas because just the unknown and ain't nobody getting screened for it. What about the things that no one is screening for that you can go – you can go to a free health clinic, a fair and get a blood pressure thing. How about taking some blood and seeing if I got some cancer or some different things like that? So we have to up our game. And I think that one of the things that woke me up was seeing little kids not playing because they had cancer, because before I was like, “Why Me?” So I entered that cancer center. You know what I mean? And when I entered that cancer center, the teaching start coming in and giving people confidence and say, “Hey,”– you know what I mean – “Come on. We can get through this” knowing that I was messed up. And I see this little kid going past with cancer who got a little brain skull cap on just as happy as they want to be, not complaining about the tubes that's hanging out of them and different things like that. And I'm sitting here complaining. We need to have guys supporting fathers about getting checkups.

You don't even have to have cancer. But if you have a father -- if you can come with me every time I have a check up, wouldn't that be something spectacular?

Lamar sees the efforts for responsible fatherhood moving into a new stage.

Although he had spoken to me before the interview of how he wanted to put together a documentary that detailed his journey, it was clear from our meeting that his concerns had also moved towards the future of the responsible fatherhood movement. Central to these concerns were efforts to address disparities in health within poor black neighborhoods, and he saw in responsible fathers a way to change that.

L: So the cancer it put me in another light of what needs to be done. You know what I mean? We don't look for credit for the things we've done and changing laws in this city and doing -- we might not even get the recognition for the things we've done but they have changed, they're done, it's time to move on to something else that needs to be done, that's critical and that's where I'm at.

### *Voices*

The strongest relational voice in Lamar's narrative is, without a doubt, that of his own daughter. Her voice is the voice of children. She provides the strength, purpose and inspiration to be a responsible father. She is the call for responsibility in its purest form, and her voice is at the core of all of Lamar's efforts in the name of fathers. T's voice speaks of the need for protection, of the need for fathers in children's lives. Without it Lamar's narrative would not make sense. Although her example is brought up regularly and her voice is at times concretely present, her voice within the narrative is mainly symbolic, resonating across narratives, a reminder and answer to the questions of how and why he became a responsible father. Her voice also stands in marked contrast to his

first four children, who have no voice within the narrative.

Lamar's family –primarily his aunt, mother and brother– are also strongly present within the narrative, although their voice is given less overt credit. Their voice appears at key moments in Lamar's life: when he decided to quit drug dealing, when he was diagnosed with Cancer. They represent the family: their strength as a voice is found in their presence when there is a crisis. Lamar envisions fathers taking a similar role than his family does: being present when they are needed. Their voice stands in stark contrast to the voice of his own father, which (as seen above) is not present but as a dark reminder: his is the voice of absence and disappointment.

L: my mom and my auntie, if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here. Every appointment, every surgery they were there. I mean, me and my mom had issues before. You know what I mean? You see that's the thing about responsibility. When your kids need you, you're going to be there regardless of the point of whatever.

Finally, present throughout Lamar's narrative are the voices of the fathers he has worked with throughout the years. They are the voice of the community, consistently brought up to speak of the collective effort, of the power of the group as a force. Their voice is also the voice of history, of the things accomplished. As we spoke and Lamar mentioned a specific name of a father within the movement, a name relevant to the topic at hand, he would point to his wall to identify him in a picture. Theirs is the voice of solidarity and support, of credibility and achievement.

### **Research question #3: Positions**

#### ***Fatherhood***

Lamar's understanding of fatherhood goes beyond biology to encompass all the different forms of social fatherhood. His position in this regard, therefore, is divorced from notions relying on biological kinship. Fatherhood is a decision, a relationship based on care between a man and a child, not a biological relationship. Lamar also positions himself as favoring presence over the provider role in the context of responsible fatherhood:

L: Spending time with them. They have to learn how to roar. They got to learn how to walk. A young lady has to learn... And finances doesn't teach that. How do you show a man, a young boy how to become a man or how to walk as one. It's not with money. How do you show that young lady that she's supposed to, you know, look at a man that's much like her dad or the person- that significant other person that is in her life as a man. You know what I mean? That's not financial

To be a responsible father, therefore, you have to be there. Although the contrast between presence and financial responsibility is highlighted often in Lamar's narrative to support his vision of responsible fatherhood as presence, he never abandons the provider role completely, showing the lived ideological dilemma opened up by privileging presence:

L: Usually people think of being responsible as financial but I think it's more so that being a responsible father to me is being able to deliver time to your children and being able to positively make sure they grow correctly and being able to keep

to and do some of their needs that they have financially but being responsible to me is...

SC: Time spent with them.

L: Time spent for them because when you're spending time you're teaching

In fact, when asked later on what are some of the basic elements that need to be there for responsible fatherhood to take place, Lamar mentions three main aspects: health, education, and financial capability to take care of a child:

L: In order to be a good a father you have to; one, have good health. Two, get education, has to be improved or it needs to be there. Three is the financial responsibility of being able to do that (...)

The role of provider, therefore, is posited above as necessary for responsible fatherhood to take place. Since responsible fatherhood has been defined as presence, then, one can only be a responsible father as long as the roles of provider and one's capability to be present do not come into conflict.

### ***Fatherhood and race***

“Just think if you had the education like you had the football. That people filled the stands for education or science fairs like they do the football stadium. That's how you help my black men.”

Lamar's position on race throughout the interview shifted frequently, managing to highlight the complexity of the topic at both structural and cultural levels while avoiding larger ideological dilemmas. He never gave the indication of supporting an essentialist view of race and pointed instead to a wide variety of factors at an individual, community and structural level that contribute to absent fatherhood within black communities. His

position, therefore, seems to support a social constructionist view of race. At a culture vs. structure level, and although causally Lamar does point to both culture and structure, it is clear that there is more weight being placed on the side of structure, with cultural factors almost always being traced back to structural ones. Lamar argued, for example, that society has been rewarding the wrong kind of skills within black communities; men who would have never been followed or admired while he was growing up are now being made into role models of success for parents and children.

Lamar: See, you got a different society, you got more money being made in the history of the world by these young black, uneducated guys that's playing football. What's wrong with the hood? It's still the hood. Because there nobody came and invested no money where it should have been. (...)So, these guys are making money. Again, it goes back to the dumb theory. Because when I was coming up, he was dumb, you have that dumb track on your head. There ain't nobody follow you. Now you taking where these young men, they don't have to be really educated because they don't know that because you have society in the system frame on the fact that they can run this ball or they can dunk this ball. So, you giving this man a \$100 million, but you ain't giving him no social skills, no -- you know what I mean? No financial skills. He's still uneducated. He's just an uneducated mother-fucker with money, right? You know what I mean? And he's hostile, he's still violent, he's still everything that he portrayed, but now he has money to do any and everything he wants to do, then you incarcerate him for being himself? Such as Mike Tyson's, you see what I'm saying? Your Plaxicos...Do you see what I'm saying? Santonio Holmes...you know what I

mean? You can go down the line. You can go down the line. You pimpin' these people for their skills but you ain't educating them on what they need to be educated. I say, you're affecting us in the wrong way. Because now, the emphasis ain't on his mother for that kid to be a doctor. The emphasis is for that kid to be on that TV running that football making more than a doctor.

The result of rewarding the wrong kind of skills is a large number of uneducated males that can perform jobs in the community with their hands but are embarrassed about their lack of education and stay away from traditional avenues of success. In order to address their needs and steer them in the right direction, the community needs to step-up, as the only way to draw them in is through individuals they can trust and do not make them feel ashamed:

L: They can fix you car. They can't read. They can fix your car fantastic and they might not call it a piece that you call it but the – what I'm saying – their -- the trait, meaning they're good with their hands. Do you know what I mean? I know guys that they can't read but they can do a lot of different things. And, you know, there are a lot of fathers out here that can't read, they're afraid to come to us because they can't read. You know what I mean? So how do we help it? We help it – we don't – we solve the problem by having the people that they know and in your community that been through life experiences that they can trust.

Lamar pointed also to the role of different concrete institutions in helping create and maintain a culture where responsible fatherhood is the exception. To the already mentioned role of family court in dividing families and punishing fathers, Lamar adds the role of jail and incarceration in undermining the confidence and ability to succeed of

black men. Lamar highlights the economic and social factors pushing high incarcerations rates among black men, describing the penitentiary system as “legalized slavery”:

Lamar: They don't learn discipline until they head to jail because you ain't going to talk that way to the CO, you ain't going to talk that way to them because they're going to pull that pin and you're going to get your butt beat. But out here in society, they'd say you ain't got to listen to your mom or your dad, we will arrest them. That makes sense to you? That don't make sense. Especially while they're still building penitentiaries in the dessert, and the privatization of penitentiaries... this is legalized slavery. So, you wonder what our confidence level is?

The consequences of poverty are also a theme. Speaking of his own struggle with cancer, Lamar points to the role of poverty as an impediment when buying medications or getting health services. As stated before, father presence is predicated on the ability of fathers to stay healthy, so without health there can't be responsible fathers:

Lamar: You know how much my medicine for cancer is, \$1,500 a bottle. (...) I mean a lot of us is poor. We can't pay for that stuff, so it's a death sentence because you can't pay for the medication, you ain't got no health coverage so they die, period.

The history of discrimination, and abuse at the hands of the white establishment and its effects in black communities is also brought up. Here, for example, Lamar refers to the Tuskegee syphilis experiments performed on black men over decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and their effects on creating a view of the medical establishment as dangerous:

Lamar: So we got to break the stereotype that men are – which we were afraid



through history of going to the hospitals. You got to back forward in our history. See, again, you're talking to a person that knows this history. So, you know, I don't do flu shot because the shot – the white guys with the syphilis -- do you know what I mean? That's our history. You know what I mean? So a lot of us don't do the doctors because of what we hear from family and – you know what I mean -- the older family on why they didn't go to... the atrocities, you know what I mean? Who wants to go through that?

Although for Lamar the history of discrimination, poverty, education, lack of health care, family court, and incarceration are all big pieces of the puzzle, he also blames the media for feeding stereotypes about violence and crime within black communities, and never highlighting the efforts of young entrepreneurs who are attempting to start businesses that will benefit the community. Without support, these young entrepreneurs often see their businesses crumble and are forced to turn to other means of making money on the side, such as drug dealing, that can guarantee an income:

Lamar: Isn't it just amazing that -- that things you are not reading, you are not reading about the young entrepreneur black guys that are in these areas? They are going positive. You're readings about the bad things that occur with fathers, the bad things that occur with black males. The media has a lot to do with it because you see that on section on praising the young guys and the young females in each area that are doing positive as young entrepreneurs because you won't do that, why? So you get the young entrepreneur person that you know what I mean might need a little help because the business is getting ready to fall. If he had some publication he can get some help, you know what I'm saying ? So now you

get him, he's on the side now [laughter] so that's it. "Well I did have a business but no effect so now I'm doing this." (...) There is no money in me saying that [John Stevens] is now doing a good job and has a nice little auto body place that you might want to go to that is in the Homewood area on the Hill district area that you know what I mean, that he does good work. Now you want to hear about [John Smith] killing somebody or shooting somebody that is not -- that's not make good news to me, you know what I mean?

The image of black males portrayed in the media and reinforced by the system is a deep source of frustration. Lamar points to how all the stereotypes are not true, and to the effects of a punishing system on a community that is regularly depicted by the system as bad.

Lamar: Because a lot of times, I would get frustrated, you know what I mean? At the system, at what they say I am. I hated the fact that they locked everybody together as they did -- they did, and that's not true. Again, you think these kids would get these Air Jordan tennis shoes with their welfare checks? You know, there's some fathers out there doing it. And then there's a lot of fathers out there that don't want to go through that stuff because they don't understand the system and they feel, well, every time you -- it's a punishment. So they're defensive about that. I don't know, you ain't telling me what to do. I'm taking care of my child but she ain't telling you that. No. It's not like that. So that's one of the statistics about being a black father and a black mother. All of us who are not bad (...)

Although structural factors are favored overall in his explanations, Lamar also

points to cultural factors. Here, for example, he describes the difficulty of working with children who live within familiar contexts where disrespect is often the norm:

Lamar: So -- we are doing it backwards because we're grabbing these children and we're teaching them to say, "yes, sir, no, sir." But when they go home, they're hearing, "bitch."

In the end, Lamar is also able to show some hope. Lamar points to how, despite everything, race is also becoming less of an issue socially: how young people care less and less about skin color.

Lamar: You got all this new...hey, listen, they don't care about color. You -- you get -- you walk, I've never seen so many white people at Homewood or the Hill in my life. [laughter] it's...walking down the street, never happen before it wouldn't happen in my era. You would have to had a police escort you to walk your butt down here, you know what I'm saying? So things have changed.

### ***Fatherhood and gender***

Out of all the themes discussed, Lamar showed the most ideological dilemmas in regard to gender. As opposed to his position on race –which suggests an understanding of race as a social construction, not essential difference– Lamar consistently endorsed during the interview an essential view of gender, where biological differences prescribe gender roles from birth. Lamar's language and illustrative metaphors, in fact, were at times reminiscent of classical patriarchal motifs relying on a Darwinian vision of the natural order. Images of packs of wild animals organized around aggression and sexual dominance were used to explain and justify gender relations between humans.

Lamar: The difference that we have as man and woman, the conversation that we

can have as man and woman, there is a difference. You see what I'm saying?

The man is driven in his mind as a protector, is weeded in us before we were even born. Period. Either you the alpha, omega male or you're not, you're just subordinate. You know what I mean? The head-wolf is making all the love. The subordinate get to watch [Laughter]. I'm a head-wolf. [Laughter] You're going to have problems because you ain't the head-wolf, I'm going to be on top of you all the time. It's in our nature, and what happens is you get a dominant female now with a less dominant male or you get a dominant male with a less dominant female where if you check out nature, only the two strong ones run the pack.

Both men and women within Lamar's vision have an important role in the development of children. Their essential differences make them necessary, as they each have to be role models of the behavior of their own gender and how to treat the other gender. Lamar, for example explains the "hard side" of her daughter's personality not through the tough environmental circumstances she has gone through (having been removed from the home and bullied at school for not having a mother), or through being raised by a father with specific views of women, but through the lack of proper gender-role modeling in her development.

Lamar: I raised my daughter. She's very beautiful, very sweet. But she has that hard side of her for being around a man because I can't do that dainty, it's not in my vocabulary, you understand what I'm saying? Even though I was telling her how to be a woman, I can't show her how to be a woman. Women had to show her how to do that curtsy, that bending of the hand, that blinking of the eyes, that switching, you know I mean like walk. What do I look like trying to teach that?

[Laughter] You know what I mean? I don't even go in that side of the world, right? [Laughter]

The quote above shows the lived ideological dilemma Lamar enters into through his position on gender. Lamar argues gender behavior must be taught –that men need to be taught how to be men, and women need to be taught how to be women– yet he also argues for supposed essential gender differences from birth that translate into different gender behavior.

During the interview, Lamar also resorted to patriarchal, sexist images of women, describing their behavior with terms such as “dainty” or “curtsy,” as above, or referring to them consistently as “females.” And yet, despite an overall patriarchal attitude towards gender, Lamar seems to have also historically changed his position to a less traditionally patriarchal one through his experiences as a single father. Early in the interview he speaks, for example of how being a single father pushed him to apologize to the women with whom he had lived and had children with in the past.

Lamar: I called those ladies, the two females that I had babies by and apologized to them because I did not know. We have a beautiful relationship. You see what I'm saying? But I called them and told them “Wow I'm very sorry.” You know what I'm mean? “I was an asshole all this time.” You know what I mean? “I humbly apologize to you.” Being at home, you need to get paid for. Because when you're at home, you're the psychologist, the psychiatrist, you're the cook, you're the maid. You're the person breaking up stuff. You know what I mean? Fights with the kids or... You know what I mean? It's so much that you're doing all in one at home! I didn't know that because I was always at work.

Lamar positions himself antagonistically in relation to women when in the context of discussing family court or intra-marital or intra-relational conflict, but seems to take a less antagonistic relationship in the context of raising children within intact relationships, marriage, or of women within his own family.

Finally, and in regard to marriage, Lamar was married once to the mother of his first child. His position on marriage in the interview is relatively clear. Lamar believes marriage is the ideal, the foundation on which to build a family, even if marriage is not needed to be a father or a mother. To be a father and a mother one has to know “self.”

Lamar: When I say holicity it is marriage, you know what I mean? A bond, you know what I mean? But it doesn't take a bond to be a father or a mother, it takes knowing self for both of you in order for you to be able to teach. It has to go back to a man and a woman, it has to go back to marriage, it has to -- it has to go because that is the foundation.

In a way Lamar seems caught between the belief that marriage is the foundation for a strong family and the awareness that marriage is becoming less common as a choice for family formation. His statements in regards to marriage therefore always point to those two positions: marriage is the ideal, but is not necessary for responsible parenting to take place.

Lamar: you should again go with what's in the best interest of the child whether you're married or you're not. It shouldn't take off your ability to be a father. If you're a father, you will be a father forever. You may not be married forever, but it's nice to have that unity because you want to teach that structure, that structure, that foundation. See when I was coming up, we had like great, great grand and

them had a 88th reunion — we don't have these type of things no more because people don't get married anymore, you understand what I'm saying?

### **Overall summary**

For Lamar, fatherhood describes a broad type of relationship that can encompass but is not limited to (or defined by) the biological link between a man and his progeny. A man becomes a father when he takes on the role of a father in a child's life. For Lamar, ideas of fatherhood, manhood and responsibility are all deeply intertwined. One becomes a man when one becomes a father and takes on the responsibility for a child. Once accepted, that responsibility extends to the rest of the community. To be a father is to be so for all the children in the community. The responsibility incurred as a father requires first the presence of the father in the daily life of the child. Lamar endorses also, as part of responsible fatherhood, the role of the father as teacher, role model, provider, and protector. Above all, being a responsible father requires "teaching self," which involves a mixture of confidence, self-esteem, and awareness of oneself.

Lamar's understanding of fatherhood must be placed within the context of three main narratives. The most important of these is the narrative that explains the process by which Lamar himself became a responsible father. Lamar decided to quit selling drugs and further his own education after the birth of his youngest child, who was born premature from a mother who did not want her. He therefore equates the birth of his daughter to his own birth into responsibility. Lamar's struggle to raise his daughter in a system that was not oriented towards helping single fathers opens up the second important narrative. Lamar fought to get services for him and his daughter, and after realizing that other fathers were going through similar circumstances, he began his efforts

to organize and help fathers learn their rights. Finally, Lamar's own struggles with cancer are at the center of the third narrative, which opens up concerns about the future, his own legacy and the health of fathers and other members of the community.

Lamar's daughter represents the most powerful relational voice within the narrative, as she is the voice that calls him to responsibility and without whom none of the other narratives make sense. Additionally, the voices of Lamar's family (brother, mother and aunt) as well as those of other fathers in the community are also present, representing respectively the family and the community as sources of support in the responsible fatherhood journey.

Although Lamar's understanding of fatherhood does not rely on biological kinship, it does rely on essentialist notions of gender. Only men can fulfill the role of fathers, as manhood is required for fatherhood. In this regard fathers (and therefore men) are necessary in the life of children for their normal development. Lamar's position on gender, in fact, is highly essentialist with clear and distinct roles that each gender fulfills and that –when things go the way that they are supposed to– come together in perfect harmony. Marriage within this context is the ideal union between men and women, and important to responsible fatherhood, even if responsible fatherhood can occur outside of marriage. Marriage between same-sex partners is rejected by Lamar on the basis that it puts kids through problems they wouldn't otherwise go through. As opposed to his views on gender, Lamar's position on race indicates a social constructionist view of race. Lamar places more weight on the structural side of the structure vs. culture debate, pointing to a wide range of structures (family court, the prison complex, poverty, education, etc.) as impediments to responsible fatherhood within black communities.



A reflexive reading highlighted three main reflexive themes. The first speaks to the emotional power of Lamar's responsible fatherhood narrative, of how in deciding to take on raising and caring for his youngest daughter by himself Lamar became a responsible father. The second reflexive theme speaks to the overall sense I had during the interview and reflexive reading of learning, of this being, beyond a research interview, a deep educational moment for myself. Finally the third reflexive theme has to do with some of my own reactions to Lamar's antagonistic positioning in regards to women or homosexual couples.

### **Summary of Summaries**

#### **Understandings of Fatherhood and Responsibility**

The definition of fatherhood varied greatly across the four fathers interviewed for this study. Bertrand endorsed ideas of fatherhood as a relationship defined by biology, where other forms of fatherhood (e.g. adoptive fathers, stepfathers) are considered secondary to that established through biological kinship. Responsibility, in this context, is also the result of the universal obligations incurred through that biological kinship. David, on the other hand, separated fatherhood from biology and implied fatherhood is a choice involving a child and a man entering into a mutual agreement where the man teaches and provides guidance, mentorship and protection for the child. Responsibility for David is relational and contextual, the result of making the choice to be a father. Hunter's implied definition of fatherhood, like Bertrand's, also relied on a biological link between father and son; in his case, however, biology simply helps determine rights over a child and does not make the relationship itself different in any way from other father-type relationships. Finally, Lamar endorsed a view of fatherhood as a unique relationship

opening men to a different relationship with the community; biology is important in establishing a specific link to a child, but it does not determine fatherhood. Fatherhood, instead, is a choice that, once made, makes men symbolic fathers, teachers and role models to other children in the community. For Lamar, then, the responsibility attached to fatherhood extends to every other child in the community.

If the definition of fatherhood –and the responsibility incurred through fatherhood– varied greatly across the fathers interviewed in this study, some of the specific requirements of responsible fatherhood did not. All four fathers endorsed father-presence, teaching, and being role models as keys to responsible fatherhood. Although these three aspects were identified as important by all fathers, the context in which these acquired importance changed from father to father. For Bertrand, for example, being a role model, teaching and being present were incurred as part of the moral obligations tied to biological fatherhood and represented the natural general requirements of fatherhood. For David, on the other hand, these were specific ways to insure the safety and survival of a child in a threatening, dangerous, and unpredictable environment. Hunter was the only one that provided examples of father-presence as directly related to engagement; for Hunter father-presence equated going to a sports game with his son, going to the beauty shop with his daughter, or watching a movie with both of them. Finally, for all fathers interviewed in this study being a provider was identified simultaneously as necessary and also as problematic, with the emphasis being stronger on one side or the other depending on the father and the topic at hand. Whereas some (Bertrand, Hunter, Lamar) put the provider role in opposition with a father’s ability to be present for his children, they all endorsed the provider role as necessary at different points in their interviews.

### **Narratives and voices**

All of the fathers interviewed in this study placed their understandings of responsibility and fatherhood in the context of their own stories as fathers or sons. Three of the four fathers (Bertrand, David, Lamar) identified some degree of difficulty with their relationship to their own fathers as a motivator in their decision to become responsible fathers. For all but one also (David, Hunter, Lamar) the relationship with their own children was a key factor in their narratives of responsible fatherhood. For Hunter and Lamar the relationship with their children (in both cases the youngest children) was the most determining factor in their decision to be responsible fathers, and provided powerful and emotional narratives of the process of becoming a father. Both Hunter and Lamar also shared the circumstance of having had to raise their youngest children on their own due to the absence of the mother.

Beyond their own narratives as fathers and sons, other narratives also were identified as powerfully impacting understandings of responsible fatherhood. For three of the fathers (David, Hunter and Lamar) narratives related to drugs, drug dealing, substance use, police enforcement, and gun violence were identified in the context of discussing impediments to responsible fatherhood. Similarly, David and Lamar described long struggles with the Family Division of the Civil Court in their fight to gain custody over their children, and identified also Family court as one of the main impediments to responsible fatherhood. All of them spoke of women at some point or other in their narratives as standing in the way of responsible fatherhood, with the degree of negative influence varying across fathers. Lamar's struggle with cancer represented the only narrative that spoke to health concerns and the effects of illness on the ability of men

within black communities to be responsible fathers.

Invariably, the most powerful voices in all the interviewed fathers' narratives were those of their own children (Hunter, Lamar) or their own fathers (Bertrand, David). Other family members (e.g. grandparents, brothers, aunts and uncles) also played specific roles in the narratives, their voices less present overall but appearing at powerful moments during narratives. For all fathers there were important voices that spoke from their absence, be it due to death, distance or abandonment. For all but one (Bertrand), the voices of the mothers of their children were either negative, representing conflict (David, Lamar), or if they were current partners (David, Hunter) mostly absent and unacknowledged. Important also was the contrast between the important role played by many of the men's mothers in their upbringing, and their muted voices in terms of acknowledged influence and overall impact in their narratives.

### **Positions on race and gender**

All fathers endorsed views of race that supported a view of race as a social construction. David was the only father who hinted at specific traits (e.g., a short temper, a desire to be admired) as uniquely "black" while also endorsing an overall view of race as a constructed category. Three of the fathers (Bertrand, David, Lamar) placed more weight on structural factors (primarily family court, poverty, drug economies, lack of education and incarceration) than cultural ones as impediments to responsible fatherhood within black communities. Hunter was the only father to emphasize cultural factors over structural ones as impediments to responsible fatherhood, pointing to a general lack of "family orientation", conflict within couples and a lack of caring within the community as culprits for father absence within black communities.

In regard to gender, and as opposed to race, all fathers endorsed views of gender difference as essential. Hunter and Lamar were the most clear in that regard (basing their views of gender difference on natural and biological metaphors), while Bertrand showed perhaps the most conflicted position, endorsing gender equality within his own marriage while also communicating essential views of gender difference at several points during the interview. Antagonistic and patriarchal views of women were also common, with gender difference translating to views of women as a “weaker” gender (Bertrand, Lamar), or as associated with negative traits such as vindictiveness, capriciousness, or seductiveness (David, Hunter, Bertrand), or simply as benefitting from social stereotypes and legal advantages (David, Lamar). Despite these positions on gender, all fathers interviewed in this study spoke of women within their own families positively and with admiration, commending them for their strength as single mothers and their support. This conflict between the experiences of gender within their own families and their views of women in general point to a strong lived ideological dilemma. Finally, three of the fathers (Bertrand, Hunter and Lamar) conceptualized marriage as an important step towards responsible fatherhood. Of these, Bertrand endorsed marriage the strongest, while Hunter and Lamar adopted more negotiated positions, arguing for marriage as important while also stating responsible fatherhood was possible outside of it. Only David dismissed marriage as irrelevant to responsible fatherhood.

### **Reflexivity**

In the reflexive reading of the interview transcripts I unveiled a number of themes. First, and during the interview my participants’ responses challenged my initial assumptions about them, and introduced me to aspects of their lives, personalities,

opinions, as well as struggles and triumphs as fathers, that I was unaware of prior to interviewing them. The reflexive reading made me gain a deeper appreciation my participants' life stories in relation to my own: their struggles as fathers and as human beings in contexts far from ideal and often under extremely difficult circumstances, circumstances I have personally never had to face. Although I had expected to bear witness to some remarkable fatherhood narratives during the interviews, I found myself profoundly moved by many of their stories. This aspect, which increased my empathy for their situations while also amplifying my understanding of their lived realities, was undoubtedly the most powerful outcome of the reflexive readings.

The reflexive readings also highlighted multiple differences and similarities between us. Although there were obvious differences along race, class, and cultural background –differences that became evident at different points in the research process– the narratives unveiled conflicts on different topics related to fatherhood. Most saliently perhaps, and across all interviews, I struggled with my participants' views of gender difference and many of their statements in regard to women eliciting patriarchal motifs. On the other hand, the interview and reflexive reading also unveiled points of deep empathy and connection. I was particularly moved, for example, on those instances in which participants spoke emotionally of their children or their relationship with their own fathers.

## Chapter V: Discussion

### Fatherhoods

We need dads, but also men who aren't dads, to make this kind of commitment not just in their own homes to their own families, but to the many young people out there who aren't lucky enough to have responsible adults in their lives. [...] Even the smallest moments can end up having an enormous impact, a lasting impact on a child's life.

President Barack Obama, 2009

The men interviewed in this study endorsed a wide variety of understandings of fatherhood. For Bertrand, fatherhood was conceptualized as a relationship determined by biological kinship, with any other form of fatherhood (stepfathers, social fathers, etc.) held in lesser esteem, as “quasi” fathers or father substitutes. His understanding is situated most clearly within the more traditional and conservative views of fatherhood best represented by some of the leaders of the pro-marriage wing of the RF movement such as Blankenhorn (1995) or Popenoe (1996). As Marsiglio et al. (1998; 2<sup>nd</sup> footnote) state, both of these authors

...emphasize the biological relationship as the only legitimate way to conceptualize fatherhood. Each also suggests that it is folly to think that persons other than biological fathers can replace all of the contributions men are uniquely capable of making to their genetic offspring.

For David, on the other hand, biology was irrelevant; what determines fatherhood is the choice of both a child and a man to enter into a father-child type of relationship

involving activities such as mentorship, teaching, and so on. His lived understanding of fatherhood seems to be more in line with the position of academics such as Dowd (2000, p. 14), who has argued that “fatherhood is a cultural role, not a biological role,” and with others like Gavanas (2004a, 2004b) or Lupton and Barclay (1996) who emphasize the socially constructed nature of fatherhood. Hunter and Lamar provided variations of Bertrand’s and David’s understandings of fatherhood, endorsing views of fatherhood as a biological link, while also arguing that fatherhood goes beyond, and does not necessitate, biological kinship. Their understandings seemed to be most clearly situated within the “fragile-families” wing of the RF movement, which tends to de-emphasize the importance of marriage and biology as key aspects of responsible fatherhood, while focusing more on the activities of fathers as fathers. Both Hunter and Lamar, particularly the latter, emphasized in different ways the social and community aspects of fatherhood: the importance of fathers within the community as leaders, role models and social fathers of other children that may not have their fathers present.

In their comprehensive report on male parenting, Marsiglio et al. (1998) argue that defining fatherhood in the United States is a complicated task that depends on a wide variety of factors. Definitions of fatherhood vary according to the interests involved, the perspective taken, and the context in which the particular definition is used. The typical and most common historical understanding of fatherhood, both in academia and outside of it, is intimately tied to biology: a father is defined by paternity, that is, by the genetic link between a male and his progeny. Bertrand’s understanding falls within this more traditional view of fatherhood, which Marsiglio et al. argue is being challenged on all fronts as “overly restrictive and in some cases too simplistic” (*Definitional issues and*



*rationales*, first paragraph). Today most definitions point toward a social move away from biological understandings of fatherhood and toward more flexible definitions (e.g., social fatherhood) focusing increasingly on the activities of fathers. Although these understandings of fatherhood reflect a move toward increased definitional flexibility, overall they still retain an understanding of biological fatherhood as different from other forms of fatherhood; that is, biology continues to be privileged as a definer of a special, more important type of fatherhood. David's, Hunter's and Lamar's views on fatherhood would clearly fall within these more flexible understandings of fatherhood, with each of their positions varying on the degree of importance given to biology and the social aspects of fatherhood.

Although I had expected some variation amongst the four fathers interviewed, the wide variety of understandings of fatherhood within such a small sample was a surprise, particularly given how all these fathers knew and interacted with each other regularly through the PPSMFIP. In their review of academic typologies of fatherhood, Lupton and Barclay (1996) argue for more flexibility in academic studies of fatherhood, highlighting how strict fatherhood types within social science literature fail to recognize the “differences between men of different social classes, educational level, ethnicity/cultural background and so on” (p. 14). The present study shows that drastically different understandings of fatherhood can exist even within a very small and relatively uniform (by academic standards) sample of fathers. Fatherhood, as judged by participant's answers in this study and in line with Marsiglio et al.'s (1998) arguments, is a highly dynamic concept that requires not merely paying attention to the contexts in which it appears, but also to the individual interests and perspectives of the men defining the term.

## Responsibility as Presence

William Shakespeare once wrote: "It is a wise father that knows his own child."

And --I would add -- "It is a wise society that insists on it." Fathers must spend time with their children. And let's be clear about one point -- quality time, no matter how focused it is on your child, can never take the place of being there every day. In fact, the quality of your time depends on the quantity of your time.

Vice-President Al Gore, 1998

The four fathers interviewed in this study consistently mentioned and came back to presence as the key to responsibility for fathers. Although other factors (primarily teaching and being a role model) were also touched on by all fathers to different degrees, the idea of father-presence was a recurring and repeatedly emphasized theme by all in their visions of responsible fatherhood. The choice of the word "presence" –over "engagement," "support," or "care," for example– is not an accident, and must be placed in the current context of larger fatherhood politics in the United States. As reviewed in Chapters I and II, U. S. Census demographics showing increasing numbers of mother-headed households over the 1990s triggered a moral panic over the effects of fatherlessness on society as a whole, and resulted in a wide range of social and political initiatives to address the fatherlessness problem. At the heart of the fatherlessness moral panic has always been the word "absence," implying a range of meanings, from a father who does not share the household with the child, who is not married to the mother, or –in its most extreme form– who has abandoned, does not interact with, or perhaps even know, his child. Roberta Coles (2010) has argued in *The Myth of the Missing Black Father* that the choice of "absence" as a word is problematic due to its negative

connotations implying “invisibility and noninvolvement, which further investigation has proven to be exaggerated” (p. 138). Although father-absence has been a theme in fatherhood politics in general, the word “absence” has been particularly attached to social representations of the black family, where it has been made integral to black masculinity and a defining aspect of the black family. As Seiter (1990, p. 9) states, “since the Moynihan report of the 1960s, the media have explained the problem with blacks as deriving from the absence of the father and the female-headed household (the black matriarch).” Absence, then, has been a staple of social representations of black fathers for at least five decades. Within this context, the choice of absence’s antonym, “presence,” as the emphasized requirement of responsible fatherhood by fathers in this study makes sense, and can be understood as a reaction to dominant social representations of the absent black fathers and the dysfunctional black family in the media.

Although father-presence was the most powerful common thread to all interviews in regard to fatherhood and responsibility, its use and meaning as a concept seemed to vary depending on the father. For three of the fathers interviewed (Bertrand, Hunter, Lamar) “presence” was not used in direct opposition to absence, but to the financial responsibilities of the father, that is, his role as a provider. For the majority of men interviewed here, then, the presence of the father was privileged over his role as a financial provider. This was an interesting common theme in the interviews that reflects shifting social ideals of fatherhood in the United States over the last few decades. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century images of fathers as “breadwinners” or financial providers have dominated social representations of masculinity and fatherhood (Dowd, 2000, Lupton & Barclay 1996). Men’s role as “breadwinner” meant that for a good part

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century men were expected to be away from the home, and the domestic realm was associated with femininity (Gavanas 2004b). Second wave feminism and the massive incorporation of women into the workforce in the second half of the twentieth century broke the work-home gender dichotomy, and expectations arose for men to become more involved in the domestic sphere. In this context, a new ideal of father –the “new,” involved, nurturing, sensitive father (Griswold, 1993, Marks & Palkovitz, 2004)– began to challenge the dominance of the “breadwinning” role in social representations of fatherhood. Fathers’ emphasis of presence *against* breadwinning in this study should be seen in the context of this social shift, and would seem to indicate a move towards the “new” father –which has been primarily a white middle class ideal (see Grinswold, 1993)– as an ideal of fatherhood.

Fathers in this study, however, did not abandon completely the idea of men as financial providers, and in fact endorsed that role in several instances as a necessity, even if always hierarchically placed below the man’s ability to be present. Emphasizing presence while endorsing the provider role works in theory, but in the context of past research on breadwinning it leads to a couple of paradoxes, particularly for poor black fathers. At the most basic level, and although the “new” father ideal has been gaining ground, the breadwinner role is still one of the most important definers of masculinity in American society. As White (2006) states, “in U.S. patriarchal society, one of the most critical ways of proving one’s masculinity (and also one’s heterosexuality) is by being a father, and a good father is first and foremost an economic provider” (p. 47). Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) have argued in this regard that men’s role as a provider is not simply a role, but is intimately tied to a man’s identity, so much so that his ability to be

positively involved in other ways in the domestic sphere may be tied to his performance as a breadwinner. Doherty et al. (1998), in a similar sense, state that:

It appears that feeling like a failure in the breadwinning role is associated with demoralization for fathers, which causes their relationships with their children to deteriorate (McLoyd, 1989). This phenomenon has particular relevance for African American fathers and other fathers of color, who often face serious barriers to success in the provider role, with deleterious consequences for the ability to father (p. 284)

Fathers in this study seem to invert the relationship between a man's ability to be a provider and his ability to be present, emphasizing the latter as more important when studies show the quality of a man's relationship to his children is intimately tied to his ability to provide. In this study I did not specifically ask about or look at the impact of participant fathers' work status on the quality of the relationship to their children. Nevertheless, the men's position on father-presence and breadwinning points towards a lived ideological dilemma between white middle class ideals of fatherhood emphasizing presence, and the lived-realities of poor black fathers, who may find it difficult to be positively present without being able to fulfill the provider role. Additionally, being both a provider and present within the household would seem to be predicated on the availability of well paying and regular-schedule jobs that allow for a balance between both roles. As Bertrand and Lamar indicated in their interviews, well paying jobs are rare within poor black communities, leading to underground economies (e.g. "hustling") or increased work time (or number of jobs held) to be able to survive. Both of these solutions either threaten or severely diminish a father's ability to be present. Yet Bertrand

himself, who had highlighted the lack of good paying jobs as an impediment to responsible fatherhood, severely criticized his own uncles for “working all the time” and never being present. This contradiction points again to a lived ideological dilemma between middle class ideals of fatherhood and the lived realities of poor black fathers.

Bertrand, Hunter, and Lamar -the latter to a lesser extent– spoke primarily of presence as a choice (something fathers choose or do not choose to do in the context of a range of possibilities), but a different conception of presence was put forth by David in his interview. For David, presence was conceptualized in relation to the community and institutional context in which fathers –particularly poor black fathers– live. David endorses an understanding of fatherhood as a choice, not a biological relationship. Beyond that initial choice to be a father, presence as a father is something one attempts to guarantee or insure in the context of threatening circumstances. Family court, incarceration, hustling and neighborhood violence all threaten a father’s presence in the life of his children. The concept of presence here is almost defensive, not as much of a choice but a goal that requires “strategizing” to accomplish. As David stated, “opportunities to be incarcerated where I live is – probably is high, is just, like the opportunity to walk out of the house and dying. Both those things can happen, like... within the blink of an eye in these communities.” Although Lamar, like David, also speaks extensively to the role of structural factors such as incarceration, violence, or family court in keeping fathers away from their children, it is David’s narrative that adapts more clearly the middle class ideal of father presence to the reality of living in a poor black community. To be present here is as much a choice as it is a daily struggle against an unpredictable and threatening environment that regularly removes fathers from

households and families.

### **The Journeys to Responsible Fatherhood**

...fatherhood is a deeply personal calling. Our own children are given to our care, and they depend on our love. Every parent knows that raising a child is among the most affirming experiences a human being will ever know. So many of my generation had the same— had this experience. When we held our children for the first time, we really found ourselves. We found a world of duty and love that changed our lives. And since that day—since that day, "dad" has been the most important title I have ever had.

President George Bush Jr. (2001)

The understandings of fatherhood and responsibility endorsed by fathers in this study must be understood in the context of the main narratives structuring their lives as fathers. For the four fathers interviewed in this study, their choices to be responsible fathers were conditioned by their own history as sons or fathers themselves. In the case of Bertrand and David, their history as sons and their relationship to their own fathers deeply influenced the type of fathers they became. Both of them had in their fathers examples of both responsibility and irresponsibility, and highlighted both those aspects as important and influential in the process of learning what to do and not to do as fathers themselves. In the case of Bertrand, the examples of responsibility and irresponsibility came from his biological father, an elusive figure straddling both responsibility and irresponsibility. In the case of David's narrative, responsibility was personified by his stepfather, an engaged father until he committed suicide, while irresponsibility was personified by his biological father, who was uninvolved for most of David's life.

Although for both Bertrand and David their fathers played a major role in their narratives, it is perhaps more salient who did not play a major role. In both Bertrand's and David's case, the voices of their own children were particularly silent, and played a passive role in their narratives. Although Bertrand's and David's own fathers were dominant figures in the narratives that led to their concept of responsible fatherhood, their own children were seen as merely receivers of their care and attention as fathers –for each in their own specific way.

In Bertrand's and David's case fathers played a major role in their decision to become responsible fathers; in the case of Hunter and Lamar it was their children that conditioned their decision to become responsible fathers. Hunter and Lamar present, in a way, the opposite scenario of Bertrand and David. In fact, the stories of both Hunter and Lamar are remarkably similar. Both had had several children before deciding to become involved as fathers, and for both that decision was conditioned by the absence of the mother from their youngest children's lives (in the case of Hunter, due to the mother being imprisoned, and in the case of Lamar due to the mother not wanting to be involved in the life of her daughter). Being confronted with being single parents, both Hunter and Lamar took steps to change their lives (up until then they had both been involved in drug use and/or sold drugs) and become responsible fathers. Their narratives then are children-focused: the decision to become responsible fathers is born out of the call of their own children, not out of their own experiences as sons –at least not as reflected in their narratives. In both Hunter's and Lamar's narratives the voices of their own fathers are mostly silent. For Hunter his father is a mere reference point in his development, for Lamar his father is spoken of as absent, although that absence is barely referred to in his



narrative. Their narratives are also different from Bertrand's and David's in that their decision to become responsible fathers is associated with large, drastic changes in their lives. Hunter had been imprisoned and in rehabilitation for drug use before the birth of his twins, and as a result his own family had turned away from him. Lamar, on the other hand, argued that his daughter saved him from a life in the "drug game." Both Hunter and Lamar argued that they were looking for a reason to turn their life around, and found it in their children.

Although for the four fathers interviewed in this study it is their relationships with their own fathers or children that are conceptualized as most important, there were also other narratives that exerted a powerful influence in some of their journeys to responsible fatherhood. For three of the fathers (David, Hunter, Lamar), the social and personal impact of poverty was strongly present as a background and important component to many of their narratives. All three fathers were also involved in the drug economy as distributors and/or consumers at one point in their lives, and pointed to this involvement as influencing in some way or other their decision to become responsible fathers. In the case of David and Lamar, legal battles within family court to get custody of their children and to have their rights recognized also drastically impacted their perceptions and positions in regard to fatherhood.

The narratives unveiled within this study help to add another layer of complexity to fathers' understandings of responsible fatherhood. Lupton and Barclay's (1996) and Marsiglio's et al. (1998) call for increased flexibility in typologies and understandings of fatherhood finds further support here. These narratives, in their variety and complexity, point to the importance of context in understanding fatherhood. They also, however,

point to the importance of paying attention to the personal history of the fathers themselves: the ways in which their personal experiences become meaningful to them and help frame their understandings of responsibility and fatherhood. At a concrete level, these narratives highlight the importance of addressing not only structural and cultural factors affecting these men, but also of knowing and considering each father's personal story (the major narratives affecting them, the meanings drawn from them) in programmatic efforts to help them become positively engaged as fathers and positive role models with their children.

### **Social Representations of Race: Resistance and Negotiation**

...Today's march is also about pride and dignity and respect. But after a generation of deepening social problems that disproportionately impact black Americans, it is also about black men taking renewed responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities. [...] It's about the frank admission that unless black men shoulder their load, no one else can help them or their brothers, their sisters, and their children escape the hard, bleak lives that too many of them still face.

President Bill Clinton (1996)

In her article *How Social Representations of Attitudes Have Informed Attitude Theories* (2006b) Howarth argues that "we should examine the social and ideological construction of 'racial difference,' looking at representations that construct and defend racial difference in social practices and institutional cultures" (p. 707). In the context of this study I have showed that within United States fatherhood politics, the moral panic over fatherlessness in the 1990s made black fathers the signifier, the social representation

of fatherlessness in America (see Chapter II). This social representation found support in U.S. Census statistics showing a significant decrease over the last few decades in traditional family formations, particularly in black communities. As a social representation, fatherlessness within black communities also resonated with and revived social and historical understandings of the black family as pathological (see Moynihan, 1967) and fueled ongoing social representations of black masculinity as “in crisis” (see Laubscher, 2005, or Brown, 2010).

The four black fathers participating in this study attempted to negotiate and resist dominant social representations of race circulating within fatherhood politics. Although none of the four fathers consistently challenged the larger assumption that a fatherlessness crisis exists particularly within the black community, Hunter and Lamar attempted to negotiate aspects of this social representation. Hunter, for example, argued initially that race was not a factor in rates of father-absence, and stated that although the father-absence crisis had been historically a problem primarily within black communities, “now it is beginning to get both sided, [...] you have a lot of white kids being raised by their grandmothers, by their mothers and they’re running amok.” This negotiated position validates the idea of a crisis but rejects overall its essential pairing with the black community, arguing fatherlessness is now being seen in other communities. Lamar offers a different take, and although he speaks of a crisis within the black community, he also blames the media for not portraying the positive stories in the community (“Isn’t it just amazing that -- that things you are not reading about the young entrepreneur black guys that are in these areas?”), and for feeding only stereotypes about black families (“So that’s one of the statistics about being a black father and a black mother. All of us who are not

bad.”). This negotiated position validates also the idea of a crisis, but –similarly to the role Cohen (1973) attributes to the media in inflating moral panics– blames media representation for part of the crisis.

Although the fathers in this study did not resist overall the idea of a fatherlessness crisis within the black community, all fathers resisted representations of racial difference based on essential traits associated with race. Instead, they offered variations that highlighted the constructedness of race and emphasized structural factors over cultural ones in their explanations of racial differences in father-absence rates. Bertrand stated that race is a problem because of how race is perceived in society. It is the consequences of being perceived as black that result in added challenges for black fathers, not any traits associated with race. David adopted a similar position to Bertrand’s, pointing throughout most of his narrative to the social and historical consequences of being perceived as black, where blackness often means being at an increased risk for being the target of discriminatory institutional practices, police harassment, incarceration, or death by violent means. Lamar also highlighted overall structural factors (poverty, discrimination, lack of education, incarceration rates) in making race a factor in the responsible fatherhood equation.

Fathers overall resisted and rejected social representations of race as an essential difference, but they also at times offered negotiated versions of those same social representations that let in essence through the back door. David, for example, endorsed “short-temper” as an essential trait in black men (“this is in us”) that increases incarceration rates, as opposed to, for example, short temper being a consequence of systemic discrimination. Hunter, also –and despite arguing race is not a factor overall–

stated that there is a lack of “family orientation” within black communities in comparison to other racial groups. This statement seemed to imply there are essential racial differences in regard to family life (“us black have not had, that and we do not do that”) and that resembles Moynihan’s (1967) representation of the black family as pathological. The presence of these moments is evidence of conflicting modes of explanation used within the same context. In this regard, Howarth (2006b) has stated that

In order for social representations to exist and to circulate in dynamic and constantly changing ways, individuals must interpret and reinterpret each and every representation open to them. Hence, representations may contain as much conflict and contradictions as conformity or consensus (2006b, p. 698)

These contradictions in representation can appear several times within the same narrative. Hunter, for example, despite arguing that there is a lack of “family orientation” within black communities, contradicted himself again moments later, stating:

“blacks...like I said, we were couples. We were all raised that way. My grandparents and great grandparents were always together. Families, you know what I mean. So, we were raised up that way, we know what it is.” The negotiation here seems to be taking place at the point where dominant social representations of black families as pathological conflict with Hunter’s own personal family history. This back and forth between both resisting and reinforcing essential difference speaks to the polyphasic nature of representations. As stated in Chapter II, cognitive polyphasia refers to the dynamic co-existence of different theories, understanding, ideas, images, and so on (in this case, for example, race as essential difference vs. race as social construction), within the same representation.

Although on the surface contradiction in Hunter’s narrative undermines his arguments, in

the context of the theory of social representations the dynamic co-existence of different knowledge systems and understandings speaks to difference, dialogue, negotiation, and ultimately, the possibility for change.

### **Social Representations of Gender: Hegemony and Negotiation**

When we talk about issues like child care and work-family balance, we call them "women's issues" and "mothers' issues." Too often when we talk about fatherhood and personal responsibility, we talk about it in political terms, in terms of left and right, conservative/liberal, instead of what's right and what's wrong. [...] We can all agree that we've got too many mothers out there forced to do everything all by themselves. They're doing a heroic job, often under trying circumstances. They deserve a lot of credit for that. But they shouldn't have to do it alone.

President Barack Obama (2010)

Speaking of Social Representations Theory, Howarth (2006b) states that ...representations operate in relation to other social representations in constantly changing and unique ways and via social debate and dialogue. This means that in order to understand why someone reacts in a particular way, one needs to understand the social representations that this person holds and the social representations 'going on' around him or her—embedded in particular organizational and institutionalized cultures, social histories and ideological relations (2006b p. 697)

In Chapter II I have argued that social representations of gender within men's movements such as the Responsible Fatherhood (RF) or the Father Rights movement endorse an overall vision of gender based on the idea of "difference-based equality," (Gavanas,

2004a, p. 119). According to this idea, gender difference is essential and grounded in biology, yet equal in regards to the law. Women and men are represented as complimentary, their biological differences predisposing them to different roles within the family. Men are better equipped for tasks such as leadership and discipline while women are better equipped for tasks such as child care and “softer” familial responsibilities (school education, housework, the organizing of children’s extra curricular activities, and so on). Because of their association with strength, fathers are constructed within these social representations as unique in their role as fathers, helping to masculinize the family and to protect it against large social ills such as poverty or criminal behavior. The endorsement of a unique father-role is made in opposition to modern ideals of fathers, such as the “new” father, which have tended to equate fathers to mothers (what is often referred to within the RF movement as “androgynous” figures, see Blankenhorn 1995). At the same time, outside of marriage young men are often represented as hyper-sexual and aggressive. In this context, marriage is promoted as the key to stopping the fatherlessness crisis and saving society from both the effects of un-socialized young males, and of single women excessively feminizing the domestic sphere.

Although fathers in this study adopted resistant and negotiated positions in regard to dominant social representations of race, their positions in regard to representations of gender can be described, overall, as primarily hegemonic (that is, endorsing dominant social representations) and, in specific instances, negotiated. It was when speaking of issues related to gender difference that participant fathers adopted positions most clearly associated with hegemonic representations of gender difference as essential and grounded

in biology. Despite this, and in general, there seemed to be across all fathers a drastic difference between statements made in regard to gender difference and women in general, and statements about specific women within their own families, particularly their mothers. This was an interesting pattern that was repeated throughout all interviews, and that resulted overall in hegemonic or dominant social representations of gender when speaking in abstract or general terms, and in negotiated social representations when speaking of specific family members.

All the fathers interviewed endorsed general views of gender as an essential difference, a difference that was used to justify certain prescribed roles within the family system and overall attitudes towards women in general. Bertrand, for example, argued that men and women bring different things to a marriage, and associated men with discipline and structure while also arguing mothers were less disciplined and tended to spoil their children. David portrayed women in general as emotional, irrational, and manipulative. In the context of families, David associated mothers with nurturing behaviors and soft familial responsibilities, and men with discipline and leadership. For Hunter, also, gender difference was seen as essential and translated into specific and unexchangeable roles within the family system. Men and women serve as gender role models for same-gender children, as well as role models of how to treat the other gender. Finally, for Lamar biological differences prescribe gender roles from birth, and those roles cannot be exchanged. Lamar adopts perhaps the most clearly hegemonic position in relation to dominant representations of gender, resorting to nature metaphors for justifying and explaining relationships of dominance between genders, as well as often utilizing language reminiscent of traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women.



Although all fathers reproduced in their narratives dominant representations of gender difference, their positions changed markedly when they spoke of women within their own families. Bertrand, for example, while arguing most mothers he knew were not strict enough with their children, stated his mother was an exception and praised her for raising him as a single mother. David similarly, took an antagonistic position in regards to women, but praised the women in his family for their strength and, in the case of his mother, also for her persistence and struggle to raise him as a single parent. Hunter also praised his mother for her efforts as a single mother once she and his father separated. Finally, Lamar praised his mother and his aunt for always being there for him during difficult times. This negotiated position taken by all fathers can be understood as resulting from the tension between (1) representations arising from their own histories as men raised by single mothers, and (2) dominant social representations of women within fatherhood politics that consistently represent single women as needing men to successfully raise children. Fathers within this study typically used two rhetorical strategies when speaking of women, doing so in terms of their weaknesses when speaking in general about them (as in belonging to the general category “women”), and in terms of their strengths when speaking of specific women within their own families, such as their own mothers.

When speaking of marriage, fathers’ positions in regard to dominant social representations varied. Bertrand, for example, adopted a hegemonic position, speaking of marriage as a necessary element for responsible fatherhood to take place. Hunter and Lamar, on the other hand, adopted negotiated positions, praising the importance of marriage in responsible fatherhood, but not making it necessary for fathers to be married

in order to be responsible. Finally, David adopted the sole resistant position in regard to dominant representations of marriage circulating fatherhood politics, arguing that marriage is irrelevant to responsible fatherhood and stating that what is important is the quality of the relationship between father and mother, whether they are married or not. Their positions seem to indicate that although marriage for most of them still holds significant symbolic value, it is not considered necessary for responsible fatherhood to take place.

### **Reflexivity: A European Point of View?**

After I interviewed him, Lamar asked me (with the intensity that characterized him) to make sure I wrote my dissertation from the point of view of a European, so that people would realize “how fucked-up this shit is.” I did not ask him then to explain what he meant, since it seemed relatively evident. Lamar had mentioned how the United States government should learn from European-style social programs, which according to him do a much better job serving their own citizens’ needs than social programs in the United States. As a Spanish citizen I represented Europe to him, and he was asking me to provide the European point of view on some of the main issues we had talked about, such as discrimination, poverty, neighborhood violence, healthcare, or education. He was also, in a way, asking me to provide the point of view of a foreigner, of someone with limited knowledge of the lived realities of black fathers and families in the United States, someone perhaps “seeing” their world for the first time.

I have tried throughout this dissertation to be transparent and open about my positionality in regard to the main issues discussed, and the process by which this study was conducted. As stated in Chapter III, this has involved a double process. First, I

unveiled in Chapter III what I called my “static” positionality: the wide number of relatively stable presuppositions and assumptions about the world I bring to the research itself. Second, I have included a process through which to capture “dynamic” reflexivity –that is, reflexiveness in motion, a “bouncing up” of my so-called static positionality against the reactions and narratives provided by participants, captured in the reflexive readings of their narratives (see Appendixes A through D). In a way, in fact, this dissertation could be divided into two parts. On the one hand, the classical academic requirements of a dissertation called for a relatively standard study (chapters I through V). This study had a specific guiding purpose represented by three research questions, and required several steps that led to a number of results, already almost completely reviewed and discussed. Yet this dissertation also included an extensive reflexive component, best represented by the reflexive readings of the interviews (although also by certain sections of Chapter III), which was supposed to serve primarily –although not only–as a clarifying companion to the rest of the study. Although (barring the limitations of this study, as discussed below) several insights have been gained from the traditional part of this study, as a researcher and beyond the process itself, it has been the reflexive readings of the interviews that surprised me most. In Chapter IV I have provided summaries of the reflexive readings that will give readers an overview of my reflexive reaction to the interviews. Yet these summaries cannot but reduce the complexity of the reflexive readings to a few bullet points that, although helpful in the context of the requirements of the study, steal from what has been at times a very personal reaction to the narratives. If there is therefore any place in which Lamar’s so-called “European” can be found, it is in these reflexive readings. Personally, it is these readings that show

glimpses of the experience that this research has represented for me personally, and that tell, in my eyes, the more interesting story, a story that to be captured in its totality, needs to be read in the format presented, with all its nuances and unusual details.

Overall, and in fulfillment again of the more traditional requirements of this study, the reflexive readings show the extent to which participant fathers' narratives challenged my pre-interview assumptions about them. The interviews contained powerful stories, and revealed struggles that deeply impacted how I saw them, increasing my appreciation for their plight as black fathers. The death of David's stepfather by suicide, Lamar's fight to regain custody of his daughter after she was removed from his home by CYF, or the story of Hunter's return from drug addiction to become a single father to his twins, all powerfully transformed the way I saw them as well as both fathers and men. As I summarize in Chapter IV, the reflexive readings also showed the play of difference between us both in terms of lived realities as well as in terms of our positions in regard to some of the issues addressed. Particularly relevant here in regard to the latter were some of their views on gender difference as essential, the way these resonated with patriarchal motifs, and the clash with my own more liberal views.

Important reflexive questions remain partly unanswered, which I addressed in Chapter III. As a white European male, I cannot assume that the social representations I embody along race, gender or class, for example, did not impact the interviews as conducted in this study. Although I volunteered and participated in group activities at different times with all the fathers interviewed for this study, and some of them –as their responses show– considered me one of their own, the differences I embody represent long histories of conflict, oppression and struggle that I would be innocent to dismiss as

not having played a factor in their responses. Within this view it might be useful to ask the question, for example, how might the interviews have been different had I been a black man, or a black woman, or a white woman? In which ways might participant fathers have changed their answers? The problem with this line of thought, of course, is that it assumes that there is an absolute “Truth” to be found in my participants’ narratives, a truth for which things such as one’s skin color provide better or worse access. Instead, in this study I’ve adopted a view of truth as constructed, specifically as *aletheia*, a process of unconcealment (Packer & Addison, 1989) taking place in every stage of the research, from the conceptualization, to the literature review, to the interview, to each reading—mine, my dissertation committee’s, my participants’, and any future “others.” The question is not whether a researcher can gain access to an absolute Truth by attempting to control for the effects of difference, but to account for difference in a way that unconceals specific truths about human experience in the context in which that difference was at play—in this case as elicited by me and the difference and sameness I embody. It is this type of truth I have attempted to gain access to in the reflexive readings of the interviews.

Finally, in Chapter II I argued that similarly to the view of the moon from the Earth, social representations of the plight of black fathers tend to show only one side of their story. This side is the only side which is visible from the majority of society’s point of view, and that consistently reinforces general stereotypes about black fathers as the symbolic folk devils in the absent fatherhood crisis. As with the moon, for which certain features only come into view from Earth every so often, positive images of black fathers are mostly absent, and, when present, serve mostly to confirm the negative stereotype as

the exception that proves the rule. These positive stories are presented as “unique” outcomes that reflect capitalist-protestant ideals of individual struggle, success and achievement, (as opposed to the negative stories, which are made to represent black fatherhood in general). An entire side of the moon, finally, remains always unseen from Earth. This so called “dark side of the moon” –an important misnomer, as it is illuminated regularly by the sun just never visible from our vantage point in Earth– is, within this metaphor, composed by all the moments that complicate and challenge the stereotypical representations of black fathers. It is this side of the moon, which shows black fathers in all their complexity as both extraordinary and flawed, that I feel that I was allowed to witness and that I hope to have portrayed respectfully and fairly here.

### **Conclusion and Practical Implications**

In this study I have shown that over the last few decades in the United States, fathers have been in the national spotlight due to the large reported numbers of fathers absent, excluded, or otherwise simply uninvolved in the lives of their children. Fatherlessness has been blamed for every social problem imaginable, from poverty, to drug use, to unemployment, to even the increase in the federal deficit (Gavanas 2004a). Although in theory the increase in social attention affected all fathers, in reality the statistics on absent fatherhood have placed particularly black fathers at the center of the father-crisis narrative, making them the social signifiers of father-absence in America. As Seiter (1990) states,

Since the Moynihan report of the 1960s, the media have explained the problem with blacks as deriving from the absence of the father and the female-headed household (the black matriarch) [...] this thesis, which has been remarkably

durable as an ideological construct, denies the possibility that black poverty is created through white economic privilege (hooks, 1981, pp. 51-86). The history of slavery, the grossly inferior public education system, and employment discrimination vanish and the black family is the source of the problem (p. 9).

As a response to the fatherlessness crisis, responsible fatherhood practices have been promoted as a way to solve both father absence and every other social ill affecting black America. In this context, this study has sought to explore how black fathers that have made responsible fatherhood an important part of their identity (in this case through volunteering their time to a RF program) understood the term. Particularly, and given the multitude of conflicting social representations under the RF rubric, I was interested in how these men position themselves in regard to dominant social representations of race and gender in United States fatherhood politics.

The four black fathers that participated in this study provided a wide range of understandings of fatherhood, from a strictly biological relationship, to a choice between a man and a child to enter a specific type of relationship, to a social role involving a change in men's relationship to the larger community. The widely different understandings of fatherhood found within such a small sample point to fatherhood as a highly dynamic concept that requires not merely paying attention to the contexts in which it appears, but also to the individual interests and perspectives of those defining the term. Despite these different understandings of fatherhood, all of the fathers highlighted father presence as the key to his ability to be responsible, a fact that must be understood –I have argued– in the context of the history and dominant social representations of father-absence affecting them. Participant fathers also often spoke of father presence by

contrasting presence to a father's financial responsibility. This makes sense in the context of the history of fatherhood in America (see Grinswold 1993), but presents two challenges in regard to poor black fathers. On the one hand, Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) and Doherty et al. (1998) have pointed how a man's relationship to his children is intimately tied to his ability to provide. The breadwinning role, therefore, would seem essential to a father's ability to be responsible and to have a positive relationship with his children. The fathers in the present study seemed to invert that relationship, prioritizing presence over a man's ability to fulfill the provider role. The fathers participating in the present study also spoke of a father's ability to be present as a choice of the father—a middle class ideal that would not on the surface seem to apply to their lived realities. As several fathers indicated, good paying jobs are not frequently available within black communities, requiring fathers to either long work hours, hold several jobs, or enter illegal economies as the only possible solutions for economic survival. Any of these choices would severely reduce or threaten a father's ability to be present during extended periods of time in the household, placing the father in an impossible dilemma: be "responsible" by providing and not being present, or be "responsible" by being present and not providing. This ideological dilemma is conceptualized here as the result of applying middle class ideals of fatherhood and responsibility to the lived realities of poor black fathers.

The narratives of fathers revealed the very different ways in which participating fathers arrived at their understandings of responsibility and fatherhood. Two of the fathers highlighted their relationship to their own fathers as playing a major role in their understandings of responsibility and fatherhood. Two other fathers pointed to their



relationship to their youngest children as having a major impact. Other narratives pointed to the important role of structural factors such as poverty, drug economies or family court. These narratives add another layer of complexity to fathers' understandings of responsible fatherhood, that of each father's personal history.

The fathers participating in this study adopted both negotiated and resistant positions in regard to dominant social representations of *race* within fatherhood politics. In contrast, they adopted negotiated and hegemonic positions in regard to dominant social representations of *gender*. In regard to race, two of the fathers adopted negotiated positions when speaking of a fatherhood crisis in the black community. Without challenging the concept of crisis, they sought to revise its application only to black communities and the way in which that crisis is represented in the media. All fathers, overall, resisted ideas of *race* as essence, endorsing instead ideas that imply that race is a social construction that carries particular consequences because of the way in which it has been historically represented. In regard to *gender*, all fathers adopted hegemonic positions endorsing views of gender difference as essential and as grounded in biology. Overall, men were associated with qualities such as leadership and discipline, and women with nurturance and soft family responsibilities. Hegemonic positions, however, were negotiated for all men when discussing the women within their own family, particularly their mothers. In this way, the fathers in this study adopted hegemonic positions when referring to the general category "women," but adopted negotiated ones when speaking of women within their own families. Anthony Neal has argued that "there is no blueprint that exists to help produce young black men in America who are even remotely sensitive to the differing realities of women, particularly black women" (p. 31). This study shows

that a possible way to increase this sensitivity may involve speaking of women always in the context of concrete, specific examples drawn from men's own families and not as a general, abstract concept.

Although positions in regard to dominant social representations of gender difference were consistently hegemonic and negotiated, positions in regard to the importance of marriage within the context of responsible fatherhood were varied. One of the fathers adopted a hegemonic position, reinforcing dominant social representations of marriage as essential to responsible fatherhood. Another father resisted such social representations, dismissing marriage's importance within the context of responsible fatherhood. Finally, two of the fathers adopted negotiated positions, praising the value of marriage while also stating it is not essential to responsible fatherhood. These positions, overall, suggest marriage still holds significant symbolic value as an important way to create the conditions for responsible fatherhood to take place, even if for the majority of the fathers in this study it is not the only path to do so.

The conclusions drawn from this study should be placed within the context of the study's limitations. For one, the size of the sample was very small, even for qualitative research standards. This research should be considered together with other studies seeking to give voice to black fathers' narratives and understandings of responsible fatherhood. As stated in Chapter 1, part of the purpose of this study was to address the limited number of social science studies that give voice to black fathers, and despite its sample size, this study does exactly that, contributing to increase complexity in the representation of black fathers' lived realities. In order to strengthen the final results, however, further research taking a similar approach as this study should increase the

sample size of fathers interviewed.

Additionally, all four fathers participating in this study were volunteers in the same program emphasizing responsible fatherhood within the city of Pittsburgh. This presents an obvious sampling limitation. The fathers' own responsible fatherhood practices were not a focus of this study, nor was the influence of the responsible fatherhood program on their views, both factors that may have been valuable in adding different layers of understanding to the fathers' narratives. Further research taking a similar approach could assess participant fathers' responsible fatherhood practices and the influence of the RF programs in which the fathers may be involved.

Finally, this research utilized Critical Social Representations Theory as a way to conceptualize participant fathers' relationship to the networks of meanings on race and gender circulating in fatherhood politics in the United States over the last few decades. The dominant social representations themselves were identified from past research, media images, and political speeches, and public policy. This process however, was not limited in any particular way, nor was it structured according to any methodology (for example, looking at representations within a single journal or single television program over a specific period of time) but is the result of my own research on, and review of, available studies, popular literature and media, and political speeches and policy on responsible fatherhood. Although I am fairly confident that my research is relatively comprehensive, future research could include a more systematic methodology of identifying social representations. This would help add another level of verifiability of the results by limiting the initial field of inquiry to a specific medium over a specific time.

The present study is important in what it achieves, as well in how it achieves it. In regard to how, this study increases complexity in representation by incorporating several theories and methods that highlight the narratives, voices, and lived realities of its participants. In doing so, this study provides a small counterbalance to the majority of available studies looking at black fathers, which tend to speak *about* their participants without letting their participants speak. This study also includes a strong researcher reflexive component throughout the research, including what I have termed both “static” and “dynamic” reflexive components. Doing so increases the verifiability of the results and unveils the assumptions and responses of the researcher, while highlighting the role of the researcher in the production of the results.

In regard to “what,” the interviews herein reveal a wide range of narratives and understandings of fatherhood that challenge stereotypical and simplistic social representations of black fathers as either “strong” or “deadbeats,” good or bad fathers. Instead, the narratives –as interpreted within this study– reveal complex portrayals of black fathers and their lives in communities where race, poverty, incarceration, drugs, violence, or family court all pose additional challenges and threats to responsible fatherhood. In this context, his study provides qualitative evidence that to understand fatherhood practices within black communities one must pay attention to the contexts within which black fathers exist, their histories, lived experiences and meanings drawn from them, and not by any assumed essential attributes ascribed to race. The present study also suggests that middle class ideals of fatherhood and responsibility emphasizing presence may not apply and may actually create impossible lived ideological dilemmas for poor black fathers. Finally, fathers in this study resisted and attempted to negotiate the

dominant social representations of race circulating within fatherhood politics, suggesting an awareness of the difference between ideology surrounding race and their own lived understandings of the impact of race. On the other hand, they endorsed dominant social representations of gender, only attempting to negotiate them when specifically referring to women within their own families, particularly their mothers. This result suggests an unacknowledged difference between the ideological social representation of gender difference participant fathers endorsed, and some of their own lived experience of gender and gender difference.

The small sample of fathers interviewed for this study limits the generalizability of the results attained herein. Despite this, some important practical implications can be drawn from them. For progressive social, community and policy efforts emphasizing responsible fatherhood practices, this study shows that responsible fatherhood practices are not simply the result of an individual decision to be a responsible father and a set of “responsible fatherhood” skills that a father learns. Instead, such a decision comes in the context of specific understandings, histories and circumstances. Emphasizing responsible fatherhood practices outside of the knowledge of those understandings, histories and circumstances decontextualizes the effort and makes it unlikely to succeed. For programs working with fathers, including a narrative component that pays attention to each father’s individual history and attempts to anchor the importance of responsible fatherhood practices within that specific history is much more likely to achieve longer lasting behavioral change. This anchoring effort is also important when it comes to gender conflict. As already stated, the fathers participating in this study resisted ideological social representations of gender when speaking specifically of women within their own

families. Focusing on these women's histories as mothers as a preview to discussing issues on gender should increase empathy towards mothers' plights, and facilitate a discussion where stories of gender conflict lose some of their centrality and power within fathers' narratives. Finally, this study showed that middle class ideals of fatherhood might be causing impossible expectations regarding the presence of poor fathers within families. Again, in the context of responsible fatherhood efforts, having the flexibility to change ideals of responsibility and fatherhood to adapt to each father's individual history and circumstances can lead to better results in the long term. That is, in responsible fatherhood efforts definitions of responsibility and fatherhood must be adapted to respond to each father's specific circumstances, not the other way around.

This study also carries practical implications at the level of research. The argument for increased attention to father's specific stories and the meanings drawn from them holds also true for future research efforts. The interviews within this study show that the personal narratives of each father are determinant in their choices to become engaged with their children. Fathers' specific narratives, therefore, should be the background to any study seeking to understand their choices in regards to fatherhood. Finally, the reflexive readings also highlight the practical importance of including a reflexive component to research such as this one. Beyond adding validity and verifiability to the results, adding a reflexive component to research studies such as this one helps contextualize the research further and avoid the false assumption of researcher neutrality. This can be particularly useful in future readings of the work that seek to understand the process by which the researcher made certain decisions or arrived to specific conclusions. But reflexivity is also helpful in showing the ways the research transformed (or not) the

researcher. In my case, the reflexive readings show a complex array of reactions to participants' narratives. Although most of my reactions were along the direction of what I had expected, it was their emotional depth that was surprising, and that points to how participants' narratives resonated with my own experiences as a father and a son, and served to momentarily bridge the difference between us.

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## Appendix A: Reflexive Reading of Bertrand's Interview

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| <p>SC: So, the purpose of this whole interview is to think about responsible fatherhood, right?</p> <p>BERTRAND: Right.</p> <p>SC: And so... what does responsible fatherhood... when you think of responsible fatherhood, what does it mean to you as a Black father? (1)</p> <p>BERTRAND: For me, mainly...being a father, being around and engaged and... doing what I need to do, meaning like... help take care of the child, help provide for the child, giving the child guidance, teaching the child ethics, and basically being a role model for my child or children. (2) (3)</p> <p>SC: Okay, so... you mentioned a few things there, right?</p> <p>BERTRAND: Right.</p> <p>SC: One of them was... the last one was being a role model...</p> <p>BERTRAND: Right.</p> <p>SC: Also teaching the child ethics...</p> <p>BERTRAND: Yes.</p> <p>SC: Helping take care of them.</p> <p>BERTRAND: Uh-hum, yup.</p> <p>SC: Um...Those are three and... I'm missing one maybe...</p> <p>BERTRAND: Helping provide...</p> | <p>(1) This was my first interview and although I felt prepared, when it came to asking the opening question I struggled and questioned whether I should have formulated it that way ...I remember thinking it sounded artificial and a little bit nonsensical. What does responsible fatherhood mean <i>as a black father</i>? The race aspect seemed out of place. His answer was the same answer he would have given, probably, if I had eliminated that last clause. Because it was unclear to me that his answer reflected any differences in thinking along what we consider race, I made a mental note to return to the question of race later.</p> <p>(2) In re-reading Bertrand's first answer I am struck by the sense of obligation that permeates it, the lack of overall emotion in his response, and the use of "the child" instead of "my son." I am unsure what to make of it. Fatherhood is tied to so much affect for me; it is difficult to speak of being a father without speaking of emotions. I remember thinking at the time it was strange, and expecting the word "love," for example, to come up. Later on, however, Bertrand would show speak emotionally of his son.</p> <p>(3) Two aspects of his first answer struck me then and still do now. The first one was the mention of childcare, which struck a chord because of my own involvement in childcare with my children over the last six years. The second one is the mention of ethics. Although Bertrand is speaking here of teaching ethics, not the impact of fatherhood on his own ethical position in regards to the world, it still relates fatherhood to the realm of ethics, an important detail in regards to my own</p> |
|---|--|

SC: Provide, okay. So being a provider for the child. How did... how did you come to that understanding?

BERTRAND: Largely from those males like in my family, mainly like my grandfather - my maternal grandfather...

SC: Okay.

BERTRAND: R.E....he was a guy, wasn't rich, was not college educated but always worked...you know, always try to... be an example. He went to church; he was a business owner when I really was...uh... in my life...in the developmental stages of life, between like 10 and maybe like 13, 14...uh, and even through my teenage years. But by the time I hit like 14 he, you know... he kind of began to develop dementia or signs of dementia, so, there were less opportunities to engage... But seeing him, you know, and also seeing my father, you know, uh...work and be honest, in... in addition to, you know, family members who were dishonest, for lack of better term, not necessarily with me... but they engaged in dishonest activities to survive. So, realizing that, being honest and being a decent person, I felt like... that will allow me to live (laughs softly) to be, you know... a good, a good role model, a good father, those kinds of things... rather than being dishonest. (4)

SC: So you had those two examples...one of them of dishonesty or not being a good father, is that right?

BERTRAND: Well...uh, my... my grandfather, I'll say...was always, you know... was always around, there really wasn't... there really weren't times, for me when I can recall, like him just being out and away...uh...And, and when my father was around, he was around, you know, just

views of fatherhood.

(4) Bertrand highlights the contrast between his grandfather and other members of his family, a contrast that is made along the lines of honesty/dishonesty. The use of dishonesty was peculiar to me then, and it still is: does he mean hustling? Stealing? Gambling? "Dishonest" seems like an inappropriate word. It sounds like there was nothing dishonest about what they did... Did they hide it? Lie about it? I would think "criminal" or "illegal" would work better, although it is hard to say without knowing the specifics. Over the interview I remember thinking in a few instances that there were certain ways of speaking about things that were "church-like," –this being one of them– which made sense given Bertrand's deep ties to his church, but that created a big contrast with my own views and ways of speaking about the world.

(5) Bertrand privileges presence over the role as provider, and that is clear in this and the next paragraph. Although that is discussed in the analysis, I am struck in rereading this section by the lack of context to people's ability to be present or not. It seems in reading it's simply a

like he and I would spend a lot of time together in the basement making things, playing with remote control cars, racing them, uh...you know, when I engaged in like sports, he would be available, but my grandfather, was more so like, always around his children who would be my mother and my aunts, his wife. He was at church with them... when they had babies he was there (laughs) You know... he was always around, that's why I used him because, I mean, I have uncles who were good role models as males too but oftentimes, you'd feel like they were just working all the time and...that constant "being around"...It seemed like maybe as they got older, they... they were around more but when I was younger, man, It'd be like, "Oh, there... where's uncle so and so?" "He's at work, he's out." After his first job and then he had a second job, I was like, man, are you going to spend some time with your family? (5)

SC: So, even though he was providing...

BERTRAND: right,

SC: ...they were providing...

BERTRAND: right.

SC: but they were still not a good example because they were not present...is that the idea, they were not there?

BERTRAND: I just felt that they were busy a lot; I mean... like one thing, I think it's important to be around. You know, like for movies and for fun stuff. I know you have to work to provide, but I don't know that, that time... you know, when you have fun uh...or engage in activities of like, I guess... leisure with your child or children is, is, price, is, is, you know?...can put a cost to, I don't know if you could put a

personal decision, not a result of environmental circumstance. I know in my case my father could have been around –he had the economic privilege to do so if he wanted– but decided, actively or not, not to... Is it the same case here, or were contextual circumstances more determining of the presence/absence of the men mentioned? It seems one of his uncles is getting blamed for getting two jobs and never being there. Recently I heard somebody in my personal life complain their father was never around because he was playing golf and engaging in other leisure activities all the time. Are those two comparable? Can they be criticized equally? Is Bertrand applying upper class ideals to a working class situation?

cost, attach a cost, or associate a cost with it, you know, like a dollar amount, cash. Those moments are priceless for me.

SC: And you got those from your dad and from your grandfather?

BERTRAND: Right. I would say that.

SC: And your dad got them from...from his...

BERTRAND: Well...From his? No...uh...

SC: Oh... So your grandfather is from the mother side...

BERTRAND: Maternal, right... You know, my paternal grandfather, same kinda guy. When... I didn't see him as much, but when I did see him, he was all hands on. Fun stuff, you know, he would build things. He'd...He would like, make remote control cars, so... like we would have fun together playing with them. My first RC boat, my paternal grandfather constructed it for me. So, I still have it, so he would you know, if I would go up to a place like Highland Park in Pittsburgh, he'd run it with me and stuff so... He was hands on, I just didn't spend as much time with him, so I can't really...uh...you know give a testimonial about like... whether he was always around or whether he was working and doing a whole bunch of stuff too, though...(6)

SC: And the other thing you mentioned, I'm noticing, it's the idea of being a provider on one hand, also of being present in terms of leisure and spending time with children...

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: You've mentioned also in the

(6)When I was young my father would tell me "I know that I don't call, but if you ever need me, I'll always be there." I never did, so I never put it to the test, but his approach to me was similar... If I was around he was engaged—at least early on in my life— but otherwise I wouldn't hear of him. Bernard descriptions of his father and paternal grandfather remind me of that. In the here-and-now moment they were great, but it sounds like those moments were few and far between.



beginning teaching ethics...

BERTRAND: Sure. Sure... I mean, you know, just basically teaching right from wrong and...and I would say working with my grandfather and seeing my father, and having opportunities to just do things that were... either dishonest or flagrantly dishonest...I didn't really observe him to do that. My grandfather really was, he was like a Christian, so he was a trustee at church and oftentimes, we will see him do things, you know and be altruistic, you know, and I would be like, "you're not gonna ask for money for that", or "you are not going to want something from that?" and he would be like, "No," you know, he would respond, "No, I'm not going to, you know, do anything..." He would always express like, "Man. I'm gonna be okay. God will take care of me," and stuff. And even my father, I don't know that... I'm gonna say he was as altruistic or religious if you will, but always was a hard worker. There were times I would go to work with him, he would do his job and... you know, do it to the best of his ability even at times if the jobs, or the...the work responsibilities were difficult and at times I felt like he was, being set up for failure but he would always, you know, do what he needed to do and so, yeah. (7)

SC: So that's what... what you're gonna try to teach, are you trying to teach to your son in terms of ethics?

BERTRAND: Absolutely, as well as not, you know, engaging in activities, man, like drugs or drinking... like, that's something my father never did, never took drug, never drank, never smoke, uh...you know. I don't know, I mean, as I'm growing older, those things just don't appeal to me. So, I guess they didn't appeal to him either but you know. He said he's always spoke highly of

(7) If I had to highlight difference in any way with Bertrand, it would not be along the lines of race or social class, even if those are quite clear, but it would be along religion. I know what an important role religion and the church plays in Bertrand's life –much more than what he lets on in this interview– and I know the traditional importance of religion and the church within black communities, and although I respect it, I still struggle with the importance it is often given as a mediator for good and ethical behavior. Church as a symbol/center of religious belief and practice I understand and respect; church as a center of good and ethical behavior I cringe at. My psychology professor during my Masters, Dr. Marie France Desrosiers, a sweet woman whom I deeply admired, was shot and stabbed in 2002 by a devout fellow church parishioner she had met at church (and a felon, a fact she was unaware of). Although I have always separated church attendance/practice from ethics and good behavior, that moment definitely split them for me...

not doing that... being a Service Member in the Navy, in the United States Navy, he said, even then, he's never engaged in those activities.

SC: So he was in the military?

BERTRAND: Uh-hum.

SC: Yeah. Do you think those things get in the way of being...?

BERTRAND: Oh, absolutely...

SC: A responsible father...

BERTRAND: Right because I believe like, I believe that when you do take drugs, you drink alcohol, those substances can alter your mindframe, can alter your sense of thought where you begin to... place a priority on the wrong things, you know, I... an example that either like you're placing the drugs above your family or alcohol above your family or... your thinking is so skewed that you begin to not think realistically about things. You begin to place women outside of your wife, you know, or your mother of your child above them...uh... and you know you begin to wanna spend more time with your friends, or so-called friends than you do with your son, your daughter or your wife... significant other. So I think those drugs can, can greatly hinder, even if, even if to the point you know, you're still spending time but your work performance is affected. Your health is affected... from using drugs or alcohol, so... (8)

SC: ...um..And you mentioned being, uh...being... taking, taking you away from like maybe, like... looking at other women taking you away from your wife or your significant other...

(8) I was surprised –and it still resonates with me on this reading– after the interview by the puritanism that seemed at times to be infused into many of Bertrand's answers. There are sometimes no shades of gray. Alcohol and drugs are bad in themselves: they skew men's thinking and drive them away from family towards promiscuity and pandering (I think it is the lack of the word "abuse" as a qualifier that bothers me). I don't entirely disagree, but there is something about the way in which it is formulated that sounds a little bit too puritan.

BERTRAND: Absolutely, absolutely...

SC: Uh...What role does the relationship with that significant other play in responsible fatherhood...in being a responsible father, I guess...

BERTRAND: I would say you know... being married right now since July 2006, for five years, I felt like my wife helps me to maintain a sense of balance and never going too extreme to... an area of being a slacker or lackadaisical about life as well as not being not too hard on myself which is difficult. Taking life and making it too difficult as I... strive to be successful and...and professional, you know, in the world in which we live, you know, here in America. I think it's easy to do that. Additionally though, I think somewhere in that middle ground, my wife's consistently saying, well, you know, there is a role I have to play like ...like you gotta be a father, you have to help with the responsibilities... even though they might be traditionally things that a woman would do, I need to do them, you know, (9)

SC: such as...

BERTRAND: Oh...like I've been off work so I've been staying home with my son and so... you know, I try to take him to the park, I try to take him to the library. Things from changing diapers, like my son is probably the first child as an infant who I have changed his diaper, in fact he is. I've never changed any other infant diapers other than my son. And so you know, at first when he was born, I was kinda nervous about that but as he's grown, I mean changing diapers is simple thing... (10)

SC: Yeah.

(9) I sympathize with Bertrand's view of marriage and his relationship with his wife. Towards the end of this statement, however, he states how his wife pushes him to do activities a woman would traditionally do. It is a statement that manages to sound to me both conservative and progressive at the same time. There is clearly some sharing of housework obligations taking place, yet the way in which it is formulated points to a certain resistance and endorsement of traditional gender roles. There is also the sense that it is his wife that pushes him to be a father ("you gotta be a father,") a remark that was dissonant with my own experience.

(10) This statement made me feel really close to Bertrand at the time of the interview. I was reminded of my experience with my first son, how I strove to learn everything...diapers, bottles, baths, different ways to hold him, to wrap him in blankets, etc., all driven by the desire to be the greatest father in the world...

BERTRAND: ...Cooking dinner, cleaning more, everything from like dusting and not just like major chores such as mopping, garbage, grass cutting but you know, the minor chores – dusting, polishing, cleaning windows - all those things.

SC: So...You would say that in your relationship at least...certainly...

BERTRAND: Sure.

SC: you... you have an equal distribution of chores and...

BERTRAND: Absolutely.

SC: Work...

BERTRAND: Absolutely.

SC: And not tied by tradition of what a woman does and...

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: Versus what a man does, quote – unquote ...

BERTRAND: Right. Right and the thing is I feel like, growing up, my mother being a single parent -my parents didn't live together- I feel like my mom would have done a lot of those things for me. So if I were an adult, a male living at my house right now with my mother, I would not dust, I would not wash the dishes, I would not clean mirrors. I mean there're a lot of things I just wouldn't do. Probably I would not vacuum because my mother would take care all of it (11)

SC: Take care all of it because that's the way they should, did it...

BERTRAND: Right, yeah.

11. This statement reinforces for me the amazing yet too often unrecognized work of single mothers to raise children... There is a subtle critique here: my mother did not teach me to do these things. Yet there is also a story there of a single mother doing everything for her son that is also telling...

SC: Do you think your son will he grow up to be like you or with your mom or will he be like, will you make him participate in the...

BERTRAND: Right, I'm gonna... I'm gonna encourage him and discipline him as long as he's living with us that he will have to...uh... you know, do the gambit of chores – everything from dusting to polishing, window cleaning, vacuum, if he has a little brother, might give him a little experience changing his diapers early on; teaching how to iron his clothes – all of those things are important.

SC: So there are no, as far as you're concern, there is nothing... there's nothing that is tied, no activity or no obligation that is tied to gender?

BERTRAND: Other than having a baby. I would teach my son, I mean, not that you need a woman for other things but primarily the only thing you cannot do without a woman is have a child. And you know, some folks may argue that, and they're saying like, "There's a gray area, you can adopt," but realistically to continue his legacy or our legacy, that's what you would need a woman for and you know... And also you know the Bible talks about man and woman joining and becoming one but still everything else he can do...(12)

SC: Okay,

BERTRAND: I hope so.

SC: And it sounds like you're working with a concept of sort of like what is just and what is fair...

BERTRAND: Right.

12) This was one of the most surprising moments of the interview for me. The mention of the Bible and the idea of a biological male legacy that needs to be transferred makes what could have been an otherwise relatively progressive statement on gender (you should not think of a woman to do housechores for you, etc.) into a relatively conservative one. As before, I am unsure how to read his position on gender, as he seems to hold both patriarchal and non-patriarchal positions at the same time.

SC: And sharing and this is sort of equal...um... partnership...

BERTRAND: Sure and that's the thing is kinda what I'm saying, so if I ever were to deviate from that process, my wife is the person who will say, "But realistically are you being sincere? Are you sharing the responsibilities in an equal manner?" So I have to ask myself if I'm not in the instance. I would have to ask myself, you do what I do need to...um... improve and step up. (13)

SC: Uh-huh.

BERTRAND: And do more.

SC: Do you think that all of that could happen if you were not married?

BERTRAND: I don't know who would be the one doing it? I mean, I take my mother. My mother is always held me accountable for things and you know her premise on rearing a son was that, you know, either take care of him now or you take care of him later. So you either pay now or you pay later. So she raised me to be independent so she wanted to pay, so to speak, on the front end and she wanted to train me up to be independent and self-sufficient so that I would not have to make her pay later (laughs softly)... (14)

SC: Okay but you were saying that in your mom's house, she would not have been doing all those different things...?

BERTRAND: No, I mean, I would have done what I call like the "gross chores," if you will, like trash, cut the grass, maybe mop, I always wash my own clothes, iron my own clothes but like dusting, I just never remember doing that. Dishes, never really did dishes, I mean, maybe, you

13. Again here it is the wife that "domesticates" Bertrand. Anna Gavanoas (2004) speaks of the quagmire the Responsible Fatherhood movement finds itself in in regards to masculinity. On the one hand they argue males are need to masculinize the domestic realm, which without a male it is too feminized, and yet they also argue that domestic life "domesticates" men, restraining their sexual and violent impulses. Bertrand in this interview seems at times to speak to both.

14. The discussion beginning here points to the transition from being a son to being married. Bertrand is speaking about learning to be a husband and having to negotiate certain views of gender with the realities of life in a society, where as a couple, for example, two salaries are needed to survive. It makes me think perhaps Bertrand's more progressive positions on gender (sharing of house chores, for example) are as much the result of environmental circumstance as they are of anything else.

know, if she asked me but very seldom did my mother ask me. Cleaning gutters, that's more of the chores I would have done and my mom kinda had her, I don't wanna say gender specific chores but the chores she did...

SC: Okay, so there was a sort of a difference in boys and girls at least in gender in your house when you were growing up and the stuff that a man does versus a woman does...?

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: But you see that less in your own house now?

BERTRAND: To some degree, I mean, I guess maybe it's just more equal distribution of chores. My wife will, will do some of the gross activities, but, you know, maybe not as much as I would do but she's doing some other activities that are more like fine, finer, I guess, detailed chores.

SC: Uh-huh, okay.

BERTRAND: You know even like when I think about it like clothes shopping for my son, I would buy clothes but not as much, I would rather give my wife some money so she could buy the clothes. I just don't know some things I'll buy like hats and swimming trunks but, so, that's kind of a chore in of itself because a child does need clothes...

SC: Sure, absolutely. Um...And you're obviously both working...

BERTRAND: Yes.

SC: Um...So in some ways economically you're both providing...

BERTRAND: Right, right, I mean I feel like in these days and times, it is very much necessary. Right now, I'm reading a book by Dave Ramsay called the "Total Money Maker," I don't know if you heard of it....

SC: No.

BERTRAND: But it kinda gives an interesting look and I think this is a real simple book, simple... it's a simple strategy on how to... like live and spend money as far as the economics goes. I do believe you could be living on one salary however our life, our lifestyle would probably drastically be changed, you know, if we follow, I wouldn't say if we follow, but if were to live on one salary, so...

SC: Oh, I was asking you before if, you know... not being married might change that and I actually meant more like if you're co-habiting...you knew your wife before...before you got married... for how long....? (15)

BERTRAND: I knew her for, ...from 2000 to... we got married in 2006, so from 2001 to like 2006 or for five years...

SC: Five years...

BERTRAND: So you're saying if we just were living together?

SC: Yes, so... does marriage make a difference I guess, that's the...

BERTRAND: I would say yes because my wife would not have done that. Like she told me we will not live together without being married, so...

SC: So for her it was important...

15. I was trying here to get Bertrand's opinion on cohabitation as a family formation, but it didn't work out the way I thought it would. Even now it still feels like I struggled to convey the idea of cohabitation. The idea that a couple could sleep under the same roof and behave as if they were married, without being married, was something almost beyond reach, incomprehensible. After Bertrand gives an indication that he has understood what I was trying to ask, he states that cohabitation makes responsible fatherhood more difficult because the father limits himself "by not being in the house." To me of course, cohabitation means that you are in the house... I decided not to push it, as it was telling in itself.



BERTRAND: Oh, yeah, I mean and my mom told me that too, she didn't, she thought like... what she called "laying up" was not...

SC: Was not a possibility...

BERTRAND: Was not acceptable, right... it wasn't gonna be a possibility in her house. I could not have just let my wife... or girlfriend -we were not married- just live in my mother's house and my in-laws, my wife's parents would not have tolerated that either so.

SC: Now, could it, do you think it's possible to be irresponsible fatherhood outside of marriage, though? Like for you obviously, it didn't work out that way and there were certain reasons why...(16)

BERTRAND: Right. Um...I think it is possible however I feel like, when you're not married and I don't wanna say you're not restricted to be in the house all the time that you're automatically limiting yourself just in that but to some degree by not being in that house... every opportunity that you have to be available I think you are gonna limit yourself to being a lesser responsible father. You know, I think of just simple things children may experience growing up like bed wetting. So if a child wets a bed that evening, the following day the father ...if he is not married or doesn't live in the house, so he may not see his child for, I don't know, a few days after that and so the child wakes up and so. If a child being male has to express like what occurred during the evening with his mother, I don't know if there's less of an understanding but I always wonder about things like that. And I feel like a male could better convey how that, how his son, you know, needs to like, not wet the bed versus a mother. I don't know it's kinda flipping out like,

(16) Two other aspects of this exchange are very telling to me. The first one is the fact that the expectation within his maternal family (and for his wife) was that he had to be married to live with a woman, that "laying-up" was not allowed. That of course points to a certain level of traditional marital values despite being raised by a single mother. The other (below 16 marker) is the entire discussion about bed wetting in relation to gender... The idea that mothers may "flip-out" at their sons bed-wetting and qualify it as "disgusting" was surprising and provided another window into Bertrand's traditional views of gender roles. It implies, of course, a view of women as emotional and unable to handle dirty or disgusting things, even if it is her own child's urine.

“What are you doing? It’s just disgusting...” or whatever it is...

SC: Okay so there is a, there is a sense of, even if the chores, if you don’t, if there’s an equality in terms of what it is that you’re doing in chores in the house and all of that, there’s a sense that a male brings something different...

BERTRAND: Oh, absolutely.

SC: Than a woman...

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: That a man brings something different to the relationship than a woman.

BERTRAND: True, true and in, personally, my personal belief is that men bring like structure, men bring discipline, men bring more of a rigid guideline to child rearing to the household than a mother would. (17)

SC: Okay.

BERTRAND: Mothers, I’ve seen mothers often, in some instances, there are mothers who can go against my belief and be as rigid or more so rigid than a male, but mothers often give in to their children, you know...

SC: Is that from your own experiences in your house or in just general like what you see...

BERTRAND: Oh, no. My mother, she was the one who I thought can go against my belief. She could be very rigid at times, very, just stern and...

SC: Do you think that is because she was a single parent or...?

17. Here is the first clear endorsement of essential gender roles. The role of men (discipline and structure) is defined against that of women (who “give in”), but then that picture begins to crumble as Bertrand realizes that there are mothers, including his own, that are disciplined, stern and rigid. The solution, of course, is, that they are treated as the exceptions to the rule. I remember seeing this happen in front of my eyes and realizing that he did not see the essential attributions he was making to gender and how he himself was deconstructing them and invalidating them.

BERTRAND: Right and also you know, she wanted to kind of, she wanted to let me know that I needed to respect her, you know, that's my belief. She never said that to me but that's how I think because at the same time growing up, my mother had a very many friends who had male children who basically... kinda ran the household or were disrespectful, so that was something my mother, you know, was not gonna tolerate.

SC: Okay.

BERTRAND: So she was willing to impose her will upon me in some ways (laughs)...

SC: Okay.

BERTRAND: You know, at times.

SC: Do you, I mean there's that, is that the case you think with most single mothers, is that your mother is like an exception for...

BERTRAND: I would say my mother's, is, is an exception. There are some mothers who I observe do this but I find like with Black males often sometimes, mothers...um... do not want to you know, come across, as just too mean, too stern or as like they are the parent that doesn't let their child do anything so they often, I feel, overcompensate by like giving too much freedom, providing too many materialistic things like shoes, clothes, video games, all of those things, without tying some kind of objective or goal...obtainable for their child to reach and then attaching that as like you know, some kind of token, if you will (18)

SC: You know in the original question I had...I had asked... and it's a tough question, it's asking how... what does

18. Again the fallback motif here is to blame women. I don't think however that Bertrand realizes that he is doing this. The argument that single mothers of black children spoil them by giving in to their whims and desires is powerful and makes immediately men necessary in the household, as fathers, to bring discipline back. And yet, to me, it is a fantasy. Men are as likely to spoil children, married or not, as women. It is not a woman's condition that makes them more likely to spoil a child, but, possibly, their condition as single parents (if we accept the spoiling theory is true). In any case it turns victims (women raising children on their own) into guilty parties (women that spoil children).

responsible father means to you as a black father?

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: And so part of the question is that... is that race component... is how; if you see it in any way playing out in being a father, in any particular way. And so I want go back to that...you haven't indicated necessarily that is something...up until now...

BERTRAND: Sure, sure...

SC: But I guess that's the...

BERTRAND: I mean just looking at the economics of our society and you know, what a Black male has unlimited access to versus what other fathers are males from different ethnic groups have like unlimited or a lot of access to...so when you begin to look at those things, you look at...look at it, you know, from a large perspective, you're gonna say, "What things do...does a Black male have?" I mean... a lot of access to...he has a lot of access to drugs, has a lot of access to alcohol, has a great deal of access to women. All those things that I have named though are negative versus what I would say folks from other ethnic groups have accessible to them. And when I say accessible, I'm saying readily accessible, when you walk out your door, the stuff is there, you know, the alcohol is there and when I say the alcohol, I'm talking about bars. If you go to most Black communities, plenty of bars, plenty of drugs, plenty of women who are often not married - who are often single with or without child - and so... inversely you know, some folks may argue that "This is everywhere, anyone has these available to them," but I'm talking about readily available... so when we talk about, "Does race play a component? I'm gonna say yes,

19. Here again Bertrand makes of women a "bad" category, with drugs and alcohol. Black men have a lot of access to women in their neighborhoods, which is an impediment to responsible fatherhood. I must say that I liked (and still like) Bertrand a lot, but by this point of the interview I was beginning to realize that despite having spent the last three years involved with the group, I was for the first time realizing we held very different views of women. The problem for me is not so much what he is saying -after all, I do believe sexuality and having multiple partners gets in the way of responsible fatherhood- but how it is said. It is not men's sexual desire and inability to control it (to play with another stereotype) that is an impediment, but the availability of abundant unmarried women on the prowl.

because if you say "are jobs readily available?", good jobs – jobs that offer a salary that will provide, you know, a man, a black man with an opportunity to have an excellent quality of life – I don't know, I don't know and then you look at just opportunities, I'll say, so I'll say that, I don't know that opportunities are the same for Black men so therefore I look at that economic piece because expectations by enlarge for...for...for men across the border are that men should be providers. (19)

So there's already this, this kind of assumed responsibilities, assumed role that society places upon men in general. So when you, when you're limited to, you know, Black men, you know, so you need to be responsible when you're a Black man so, wow, you can't give, it's difficult to find a job that offers a decent quality of life whether you are or are not married that's gonna put strain on that relationship between the mother or the wife. It's going to put a lot of strain in the relationship, in my opinion.

So I think it's more difficult in short for a black male to father based upon the economics, based upon what, what is readily available to him...um... Kinda based upon how he's viewed in society in general, you know, I don't know that, you know when I walk into a store or when I walk into an institution of higher education depending upon how I'm dressed, people are going to automatically assume like, "This guy works for a public entity with parents and children. He is a responsible father, he pays all his bills on time, his debt is limited to college education. Doesn't have a felony, maybe been arrested one time in his life for something superficial,"

I don't know if people see that. And again, depending on how I'm dressed when I walk

20. Bertrand asks here figuratively if

into those places, so... as a Black male and a father I feel like I'm thinking about all of these things where I don't know if someone who is, you know, white, has to think about these things. I don't know if someone who is Hispanic, considers these things or Jewish or you know, from other ethnic groups. Um...And so I think that does play a role, a large role, you know... my ethnicity. (20)

SC: So you mentioned there, I mean a number of things...

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: But certainly there was a, as an impediment...um...the lack of jobs...an impediment to being a responsible father for Black males, one of them with the lack of available jobs, of work that pays that gives you the possibility of having a future, is that one thing for... and obviously the things that are readily available in Black neighborhoods, right?

BERTRAND: Right, absolutely.

SC: Like you mentioned – alcohol, drugs - you mention also women...

BERTRAND: Absolutely because I mean if we were to take a look at...take a few steps back from kind of adulthood and you go to like you know colleges and universities and that's speaking from my vantage point because that's where I've been. And so while I was a student at Clarion University of Pennsylvania for my undergraduate degree, there were just not that very many Black males, so there were a considerable number of Black females and that takes a ratio, that creates a ratio, which I believe was maybe like for every one Black male, and I'm just gonna limit this to Black or African American students

somebody Hispanic thinks about race, about how he is being seen by others when walking into a store. I have not had that experience. I always think that as soon as I start speaking people realize I am a foreigner, but my accent rarely triggers suspicion, just curiosity. I have felt foreign and observed at establishments in West Virginia and Southern Georgia, and one time at an immigration office in Florida, but no, my experience can't compare... Most of the time I am invisible and I pass for white even if I (and many who know me) don't think I classify as white....

on campus.... One Black male to, I don't know, maybe four to five Black females, you know, not to also include the other women from within the student population who may like Black guys, if you will.

SC: Ah-hum.

So then, I mean, some guys' egos may be stroked, if you will, and I said, "Oh, yeah, everyone likes me" you know, especially because, generally, Black males are athletes...um... popular, -in my instance, that wasn't my...- but they can, often have like women gravitate toward them. And so, I wouldn't... they have like..., I don't wanna say readily available but so many to choose from and that to some degree can take your focus from what...where it needs to be, and misguided in many directions based upon whatever these women are kinda taking your mind, so. (21)

SC: So, you mentioned that there is a certain... attraction that the black male has in communities... even with women of other races like in university setting or a lot...

BERTRAND: Sure, sure.

SC: And that becomes a problem, a distraction, sexuality itself becomes a distraction.

BERTRAND: It can be. It can be...very much can be. I've observed numerous of my peers while at Clarion. I don't wanna say fall, fall victim to... but come short of...you know... achieving their goal, which you know, you go to college to obtain a degree. A lot of those guys dropped out. Some of those guys got girls pregnant. Some of them did succeed, still had children, you know, as students, which again, will complicate your life and make

21. The picture painted again here is one where black men are distracted from their obligations by women who "take" their mind places they shouldn't. The vision is again of women as commodities that seduce men and drive them away from a responsible life. Few paragraphs below, Bertrand says he has seen many of his peers "fall victim to," highlighting again this idea that women are like traps along the way to responsible fatherhood, which happens thanks to marriage (for both men and women). The thing is I am pretty sure Bertrand does not feel entirely this way, yet the language continuously betrays a particular vision of men and women that is quite patriarchal in nature.

your life more complex, that's all, as a student and as a young man...

SC: Okay, um... so there was the... the economic factors, and the women, alcohol, and drugs that you mentioned as impediments to, within Black communities for males to be responsible fathers. Is there anything else you think you can think of...?

BERTRAND: That sort of impede black males from being responsible fathers? You know... one of the things that I would say, might be themselves and when I say themselves, I'm talking about their view as individuals on fatherhood, and based on, you know, I guess wherever they developed these views, whether it came from their fathers... and I think within Black communities, these are often absentee fathers. And in some instances, there are fathers present who are instilling those things that are negative and not positive, you know, in children, you know like dishonesty, consumption of drug and alcohol; um...you know if they're married in some instances, folks are having affairs; they're fathering children outside of the home. (22)

So if children, young Black men, are observing these things and they're learning, these behaviors early on their life and I believe that helps them to develop a certain thought process as to what it means to be a father and what it means to be a Black man, and how they should live. And if they follow the example then it's gonna perpetuate, it can perpetuate, you know, a cycle that leads folks down on the wrong path.

SC: You have mentioned how you grew up without a father yourself.

22) Bertrand points to culture here, but it is in the sense of reproduction. Because fathers are engaging in all these behaviors and being irresponsible, children are learning the behaviors of the fathers and repeating it themselves later on.



BERTRAND: Right, right, I'm...

SC: Present, everyday, right?

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: So, your mother, you have no stepfather?

BERTRAND: No, my mother she, no stepfather, no, like boyfriend or living boyfriend, which I'm extremely grateful for and indebted to my Mom for.

SC: How come?

BERTRAND: Just because, you know, most women do want to have someone there everyday so they often look outside of the father of their child to someone, and that can cause problems for that child because there's a man who comes in to the house, not the father, wants to create rules, wants to, you know, I guess, act maybe as a father like quasi father, something like that, but he's not the child's actual father and that can be, that can put a strain on the relationship between the natural child and the natural mother. (23)

SC: So you think in that sense, biology, I mean... the father, there's a difference between a...between a biological father or natural father, and a stepfather. A difference that is important, at least in your experience, you were saying, you're grateful that there wasn't a stepfather in your house.

BERTRAND: Right, because I feel like it allowed for the relationship between my father and I to be as authentic as it could be, you know, inclusive of my mother, because she was still involved, you know, like both my parents would go to events like if I have banquet, you know, for sports

23) Clearly Bertrand is favoring a vision of biological fatherhood as more important than social fatherhood (at least the stepfather kind). It was surprising given the high rates of social fatherhood within black communities. Given my history and relationship with my stepfather, this comment lingered in the back of my head for a while. I had the opposite experience from Bertrand. My stepfather's presence did not put a strain in my relationship with anybody, actually pushing me to have a relationship with my biological father and actively helping my mother raise me. There is also something else that strikes me as I read this again, and is the vision of Bertrand's mother as a gatekeeper to his dad's involvement. It is the mother that "allows" for the father to have a relationship... If she had met another men, the argument would follow, Bertrand and his dad would not have had a relationship because of her.

or for academic reasons, then both of my parents would come. Parental conferences both of my parents would come. And so, I feel like, if nothing else; people knew that both of my parents were invested. And so, the fact that they didn't, we did not, we all did not live in the same household really didn't matter, on the outside, I guess it would matter to my mother, it would matter to some degree to me how my father felt, but outside of our household, both my parents were involved.

SC: And your mother did not have obviously a man come in the house. You do not have anybody else after your father...

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: Did your father?

BERTRAND: His had girlfriends, but he didn't remarry. His views on marriage are, you know (laughs), it's tough to be married. So, he didn't remarry, but he's had girlfriends. But they never resided in his house because he is a homeowner. Our mother's a homeowner. They both have their own separate homes, you know, they purchased (24)

SC: You say with a... you say with a laugh that he said marriage...that is not... that is tough.

BERTRAND: I don't, because even when I got married, he said "are you sure you want to get married? you know, it's difficult, you know, you're kind of vulnerable because you know when you get married then your wife can control what you eat, when you sleep, where you sleep, how you sleep...he said "they can control your life." And so, I felt like... you know, I really love my wife. I felt like God

24) This statement shocked me in the obvious double standard he was subjecting his mother to. Bertrand has just argued he is thankful that his mother never remarried, yet moments later he is quite forgiving of his father having girlfriends and laughs at the fact that he doesn't believe in marriage. Did his girlfriends impede Bertrand's relationship with his mother? Did they impede the relationship with his father? Ah! I wish now I would have thought about asking him that, although my guess is he would have argued that he did not live with his father, and his father did not have these girlfriends live in the house.

brought us together and it was what I needed to do so I can continued on and went on with life and got married. But he said he would never get married again because he said it's just difficult.

SC: How come you came to that understanding? How did you come to, isn't it in a way what you're telling me is that it's different from your Dad's, as a, both as a role model in terms of what he preached.

BERTRAND: Sure, sure.

SC: Right?

BERTRAND: I mean I think anytime you want a father, you know, if you do this in a conscious manner, you're going to have to have a certain amount of selflessness, meaning you're going to have to establish a certain amount of willingness to give yourself away and also sacrifice some of your desires on behalf of your child; and in my case, maybe on behalf of my wife because that is what I call my family, my most nuclear family. And I don't know that my father has a willingness to maybe to do that, you know. There are certain things that he may want that he's just going to get those things and he doesn't want anyone questioning, you know, his reasons or purpose.

SC: You say that with a smile, I wonder... is it that you're speaking in terms of women, other women, being with other women or... (25)

BERTRAND: Oh, I'm saying, anything... whether it be a car, if you want to buy a second home, if he wants to go to vacation in Vegas...

SC: So he doesn't have to be accountable

(25) I remember thinking very clearly here that he was referring to his father's relationships with other women, but Bertrand dismissed it really quickly. I thought then he was protecting him from his own criticism, but reading it now it doesn't seem as obvious.

to someone.

BERTRAND: Right, right.

SC: He doesn't want to be accountable to somebody.

BERTRAND: Right, right, right. Not with consequences, because I mean to some degree, you know, he's still as accountable. My mother can still ask him or his girlfriend, or whoever, they can ask him. But he will say, "What's it to you like?" Well, just, there is no legal tie or legal bond.

SC: And marriage creates that?

BERTRAND: Oh, my goodness, marriage creates a great deal of vulnerability in that, you know your finances are kind of open to your wife, your health to some degree is open to your wife... if you eat a diet your wife cooks, a diet, a fatty... a diet of fatty foods and things and she's not cognizant of, you know, what meal she's preparing. All of those things even extending to, I guess extended family members, you know. In a sense, when you get married, you know, your problems become your spouse's problems. Or they can become your spouse's problems when you get married. (26)

SC: But that can't happen outside of marriage. That's pretty much...

BERTRAND: That's my belief. I mean it can happen outside of marriage but you can just move on. You don't have to go through the act of getting a divorce...

SC: Legally...

BERTRAND: Right, legally, possibly, giving up some of your wealth if you have

26) I find the choice of words here is peculiar... Marriage creates "vulnerability" because your health and finances are open to your wife. There is again the trace of patriarchy in the language, the way in which the topic is approached...

it, not that I have that but if ever I attain it, my wife is entitled to it. My son, to some degree, is entitled to it, so.

SC: And you...

BERTRAND: I'm fine with that though. I'm fine with that.

SC: Your father, how old was it when, when you and he were separated?

BERTRAND: My parents were never married so.

SC: So, they're never married, okay so they were never married, so you were a child out of wedlock...

BERTRAND: Right, right, so when you think about that, that's why I also feel indebted to my mother because when you look at that, that, I was born in 1982, so it's not like I was born in 1910 where it might have been a huge stigma my mother might have had to move away. But to some degree, I felt like the American society at that point had you know, certain views on families and marriages, so I think my Mom might have had to deal with some of the stigmas around not being ready to have a child. In addition to that, all her, all of her siblings, she has three sisters who were married, you know, and then had children, so. It must have posed a lot, it might have posed a lot of difficulties for her. My Mom was 26 when she had me, and so it also kind of changed her life as well. My father -I have a half brother- so, I don't know that, it affected him that, that greatly. You know... that's the other idea of not being in the house whether or not my father's in the house, my mother still had to deal with pregnancy. The issues of pregnancy, you know, meeting the needs of herself and me as... as an unborn child.

27) For all the patriarchal language intertwined at times with his answers, Bertrand shows a lot of empathy and care for his mother here. He recognizes the difficulties in being pregnant and raising a child as a single black woman in the 1980's. He is indebted to his mother for raising him under less than perfect circumstances. Yet the same empathy is not there when he thinks of other single mothers raising children under very tough conditions. Why?

And then when I came in to the world as a, you know, a new life that's he's responsible for, you know. (27)

SC: And yet, you state it from the beginning that there's a sense of what your dad was a role model to you and what it's like to be a father... um...

BERTRAND: Right, and he's been honest with me about, you know, our situation and how, you know, for a long time, he really wanted to fight not having a child and again I think it's his character of he wants to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it. And... that selflessness that I talked about is really not something he wants to adapt, but he said, you know, after he had seen me in passing like, as an infant, that's when he realized, you know, I was a part of him and he needed to be a part of my life. And so at that point, he tried to reconcile with my mother.

SC: Okay, so it wasn't until... he wasn't present at the birth?

BERTRAND: No, he wasn't present.

SC: But it was when he saw you for the first time that he realized?

BERTRAND: Yeah, that's what he said. And so it takes a certain amount of manhood, testicular fortitude, in my opinion, to admit, you know, that you had this shortcoming or you had this will to not be a part of this person's life, being me. And then you see this person and you say, "You know what, maybe I made a mistake. I need to be a part... This is me." Because essentially you're taking two persons' DNA – my mother, my father, combining it to make what you see. And so for one of those individuals who contributed their DNA to deny being a part of my life, that

28) I can't read this without laughing at the term "testicular fortitude." I had never heard it before and had a hard time not laughing out loud at the time of the interview... I had to, of course bring it up again shortly after, if only to clarify its meaning.

would almost be like them denying themselves. And that's like self hatred, which goes into a spiral of, you know, insanity and, you know, senselessness. You just can't make sense of that. Why would one hate themselves, unless they have a psychological problem? (28)

SC: And yet it does happen, right?

BERTRAND: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, people often would deny their children. And that's something that also, you know, that goes on in the Black community there. There are people who have relationship out of their household, you know, they are married and they have a child outside of that marriage, and oftentimes, that child may go without a father, because if the mother were to come forward, there could be a huge stigma placed upon the man, and so, some of women do have that much respect for men where they just hide the child and that. (29)

SC: And you mentioned that...the term, interesting "testicular fortitude..."

BERTRAND: Right, a lot of, a lot of like awe, a lot of, you know great audacity, right...

SC: You did think that is tied together? (phone rings)

BERTRAND: I'm sorry. Let me turn this, it is on vibrate, I'm sorry. As soon as it goes off I'm going to...

SC: Yeah, yeah, of course. What time do you wanna stop to make sure?

BERTRAND: Maybe like five more minutes, is that okay?

SC: Yeah, yeah, sure.

(29) The idea that women socially hide a child because of "respect" for a man with whom they've had an affair sounds strange. Again what seems to bother me here is the language... I believe they might hide the fact that they've had a child with a married man, but I would think it wouldn't be out of respect, but out of the fear or shame of being socially ostracized.

BERTRAND: Okay, are you still recording it?

SC: Yeah, yeah, I'm still recording it. Yeah, like you mentioned, as if this is tied to gender.

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: What type of...?

BERTRAND: Yes, the way I see this is like, if a woman becomes pregnant, she cannot claim that she is not pregnant. After time, it will become visible. Where a man can claim he does not have a child. If you visibly see him, meet him for the first time, you have to take him for his word and take, you know, his word at face value. So, he says he doesn't have a child; he could be a father of many. Where a mother after so many children, her body takes a different form, and if she is any kind of person, she will not deny herself so, she would speak of this child, where men we don't carry a child, we don't develop that bond; when I say that bond, I'm saying for nine months, there's something inside of you. It's just even like... magnificent. That's probably one of the most magnificent things just for that child to develop and be birthed into the world. And so, for a mother to deny a child, she would have to be a special kind of woman who has, you know, the strength to deny the child. So most oftentimes, women do not lie about having children or deny their children. They just say, "Yeah, I have a child." And that's fine; where men, I think men, more often lie about that. (30)

SC: Because they have the possibility... its almost inverted.. you would have to have the fortitude if you were a woman to say...

BERTRAND: Right.

30) I found this to be very interesting at the time of the interview, although it seems less so now. According to Bertrand's description, it is difficult for men to accept being a father of a child (in those cases in which pregnancy was not planned) but not to ignore it or reject it; versus women, where the situation is inverted: it is difficult to reject the child, but not to accept keeping it.



SC: This is not my child.

BERTRAND: Exactly, right.

SC: Versus the man has to have the fortitude to say this is my child.

BERTRAND: Right, right, right, especially if he has tried to like deny the child at some point...

SC: Which was the case with your dad?

BERTRAND: Right, he didn't wanna, I won't say like he denied me. He didn't wanna like accept that he has to have another child, you know ...

SC: And take care of...

BERTRAND: Right, it's a responsibility, you know, and so, if you wanna really be a man then you need to, I think, just really get married and be there everyday, so you can deal with the little idiosyncrasies that a child experiences, like trips, slip and fall. They hurt their head. I don't know, even my son, right now is teething, so every now and then, he's kind of cantankerous and cranky. But if I were not living in the house, I might miss some of those moments, some of those times of development and growth. So, for me, like marriage is, I don't know, for me it's a, it's a commitment to like, responsible fathering. And so I feel like I lock my self in because I could always say I wanna get a divorce but I'm giving up so much, in my opinion, and not necessarily the materialistic things that I have but more so those opportunities of observing my child develop. So I can say to my son when he gets older, I can say I was there when you were born. My father cannot say that to me. I can say to my son, "I was there for

31) This was the first time where Bertrand spoke somewhat more emotionally of his son. Given the impact my first son had on me, I was expecting Bertrand to speak of his son this way earlier, so I was surprised it took so long. Now I feel perhaps the interview itself, its artificialness, made it seem like it was less appropriate to do so. Whatever the case, it was one of the moments in which I felt closest to him, that I empathized with him deeply. I also would be there for my children no matter what...

your first Christmas." My father couldn't say that to me, you know. And so many of those things and I'd say, why would you like, conceptually, I cannot fathom missing out of any of those opportunities I spoke of. Even if I was broke, so for whatever reason, if I was broke and destitute, I would still want, you know, my son to know, you know, I'm proud of you and I want the best for you. (31)

SC: So...um...marriage, it's different for a man than for a woman in a way... what you're saying that it makes you, like it locks you in...

BERTRAND: That's for me.

SC: but not as much, but it doesn't lock as much the woman in?

BERTRAND: When a woman has a child, they're locked in to a different scenario, kinda like I spoke of, you know, in that, I mean, they could deny this child and not take care of it but that goes to mean to a psychological problem. Who would not want to, what woman would not want to take care of a child she carried for nine months and rear it. And so, for some they don't, you know, for whatever reasons...some...there are instances like of rape and unwanted pregnancy. But I wanted the desire like situation, like when a woman like had...like...um... sexual intercourse with someone, you know, willingly, they will have the child and take care of it. And most times, they are fine; where men, they can just run away. They can get this person pregnant willingly but then they can say, they unwillingly don't want to have the child or want to be bothered, or give themselves to this child, so they can run. They can go to a different country and that's it; where the woman in a way is stuck with the child. And so, that

man also is able to go on. He can continue to repeat this process...

SC: Many times...

BERTRAND: Oh my goodness, the problem is he can repeat it a couple of times in a day. But, you know, I think though, for me, marriage absolutely does... consciously; I can say consciously, it tells me, "Okay, you know you have to go home at night. You know you cannot do anything that will shame the name of myself, my wife's name, my son's name." Not that I wanna do any of these things but sometimes, you know, people get caught up in activities. So, for me it kind of, like I said, locks me into that responsible fathering and husbanding and... (32)

SC: And all those different things.

BERTRAND: Right,

SC: And we have now probably a little time, but, so yes, there is a difference in terms of what marriage does for you and your wife, for men versus women, in a way.

BERTRAND: Right.

SC: And yet, you mentioned, of course, with you Dad, it was the moment that he saw you...

BERTRAND: Right, that's what he said.

SC: That changed it for him. Is there something that you can relate to that with your own son, I mean you were at the birth of your son?

BERTRAND: Right, no, well, I mean, I wanted to marry my wife because I loved her so, I mean, of course, you know, two

32) Again marriage becomes the domesticator, the structure that restrains the man's impulses and reigns them in. The idea that a man "shames" his wife's or his son's name sounds so antiquated to me. Bertrand does not say he would not want to hurt his wife and child, but that he does not want to shame their name. Although I understand what he is saying, his language is situated around the idea of honor, not emotion.

people married they're having a relation, relationship established and so, it's natural to desire a child, and it wasn't as though we have a planned pregnancy but I was fine with that like, I knew, if I were to die today, I would be fine with my wife rearing my son.

SC: Yeah, of course.

BERTRAND: And especially having been married to her, since she knows, especially what I desire, what I expect, and I would feel like I left that kind of legacy, you know, with my wife. But when I saw the sonogram, that's what really like, helps me to say, this is a part of me that is alive now and... and will continue to live, you know, Lord willing. And so, I have to do my part to make sure this life has the best life and the best of opportunities available. (33)

SC: Cool.

BERTRAND: Sure.

[0:51:17]

[Audio Ends]

33) This was the first mention of love in the interview. Seconds later Bertrand states he would be fine with her raising his child because she knows what he expects and desires. It seemed again strange... My reaction would have been to say that I trusted her, in the sense of doing the right thing, but not in the sense implied by Bertrand here, of doing what I want her to...

## Appendix B: Reflexive Reading of David's Interview

**SC:** So, the main question, the main topic is, what does responsible father mean to you as a black father? And I guess that's where we begin (1)

**DB:** I will say, being consistent in regards to your presence inside... you know, the child's life... always being mindful of the things that you are trying to teach to your children...um... but also being mindful of the things that you don't want to teach them...um... making sure that you put it out of the way of their eyes and their ears and their senses ...um...because, we all know that there is different learners you know, um...some people learn of course...um... just by the simple way of education, the speeches, um...you know, the lectures and so on and so forth. And some people learn from hands on...you know, where it has to be something physical. So just be a mindful of... the way you present yourself around the kids...otherwise... we're only doing a half of the job. (2)

**SC:** So, by "present yourself" you mean like a role model or just...

**DB:** Yes, um...a role model, yes... um, I mean, that's most obviously number one. But also strong, you know...um.. independent um...God-fearing... You want them to know... you know, you always wants your child in ...you know, in a black community to grow up to be strong, you know, the whole "only the strong survive." But they also have to be smart, you want to teach them the difference between a warrior and a barbarian, um... you want them to stratagise whatever, whatever it takes, so you want them to prepare for something instead of going down with just confidence...um... because of course

(1) DB and I met in an empty classroom for our interview. The classroom is in a way almost symbolic, as he in fact focused heavily -although not only-on teaching as a central aspect of responsible fatherhood.

(2) DB's initial heavy focus on teaching as a central aspect of responsible fatherhood caught me by surprise. My personal bias towards other aspects of RF (presence, love, protection, etc.) did not allow me to completely accept that teaching was the central aspect of RF for him. I remember thinking "he is thinking off the top of his head and forgetting other aspects." I think now that he attempted to adopt a position of expertise, thinking of responsible fathering in the abstract, and not of his personal experience with his children and parents. Without emotions, teaching would seem like an obvious first choice for the central aspect of RF. And yet, as we continued talking, it also became evident that teaching was a much more complex activity in his mind than what I associate with teaching.

(3) In re-reading this section I am reminded of how bothered I was and still am by the introduction of "God-fearing" as a term. My own atheism rejects the possibility that fearing God may be related in any way to RF. And yet, if I think about it calmly I can see how if God is understood as a punishing being, then fearing him becomes a way to obey his rules, a path, theoretically, to an "ethical life." The mention of God in the context of his entire interview is also strange and seems slightly out of place, as God and religion aren't mentioned anywhere else, and

warriors strategize and barbarian will just go in under the belief that they are who they are and they are going to conquer whatever they need to conquer and its not the best way they approach life. So, being mindful of those things, teaching them what you need to teach them but also showing them different ways and always keeping in mind and letting them know that there is a method to your madness because some guys go in and they will express something to their kids or to some kids, they will think that the way that they are doing it their kid will understand at the end, but sometimes its just not that way. So that's like my vision, like always being consistent, you have to be consistent whether it's with your presence or with your lessons that you are teaching (3)

**SC**You mentioned their presence, your role as a teacher, and being mindful of the ways in which you teach your kids, part of that being a role model... also transmitting this idea of being strong, but at the same time smart... right?

**DB**Yeah..

**SC**How did you come to those understandings... you yourself? (4)

**DB**Um...I came to them.. pretty much by trial and error, the presence thing has been instilled on me based on the fact that my dad wasn't as present as he should have been. So knowing that he did instill on me on how to be strong um... but you can't just be strong on like, you can't just have strong glitches, you have to be consistent on being strong in whatever that you are doing... otherwise you are not going to be taken seriously, you know, so he told me how to be strong but I didn't get the lesson on being strong.

throughout the interview I did not get the sense of religion being an important aspect of DB's life

(4) The second research question ("How did you come to those understandings?") opened up a narrative and experiential aspect of DB's interview that turned out to be extremely powerful for me.

**SC**Why do you think you didn't get it?

**DB**Because he wasn't around to show me what the definition... Now you can go and look it up in a dictionary and you can try to break it down based on what they say, but ...sometimes there is more or one definition. So, in order to understand what definition that a man speaks off, they have to show you, they cant just tell you, there has to be something that is being displayed in order for you to get the full understanding of what they are trying to say. And I didn't get that from him, but I did get it from my stepdad. (5)

**SC**Okay

**DB**But the question is... Are they both the same? You know? I guess I will never know...

**SC**So is that...? What do you mean are they both the same?

**DB**Well...my stepdad's definition of strong came off of action, as seen in... you know, his strength – his strength lied in... in protecting family by any means necessary. My dad's strength possibly meant not being afraid of things... Being strong in regards to standing up to whatever affairs, you... you have to overcome... being strong in that way, overcoming things. So I don't, you know, like I said... I can't tell you for a fact if they both had the same idea, or if... if that's, the whole nucleus of strong based on what two men thought (6)

**SC**So what you got from both was that it was important. But the lesson that really stayed with you was your stepfather's...

**DB**Yes... because it was more of a... hands on, more of a, I will show you better than I can tell you, where my dad told me but he

(5) Although I did not show it during the interview, the mention of a stepdad and the important role that he played in DB's life was powerful for me given my own relationship with my stepfather. I remember tuning in during the interview into the word "stepfather" as if it had been the most important one mentioned in this paragraph even if clearly it was DB's father's absence that was most important here.

(6) The strength motif kept on coming up. It's importance to DB is obvious throughout the interview and in his persona. But I got the sense that strength for DB was much more of a necessity than an integral aspect of who he is. That is, I saw DB's strength is a survival tool developed from and valued because of his personal experience. During the interview, however, I got the sense he was much more vulnerable that he was letting on.

didn't show me.

**S**How long was your... I mean, since when was your stepfather present?

**D**He was present pretty much basically when I was born, my mum and dad, you know when I was born they went their separate ways, and he was a part of my life until he killed himself and I was in about, um...I would say I was in fifth grade. (7)

**S**He killed himself?

**D**He hung himself. So when he did like it was like um...a major missing piece... because I would always go to him for advice. I never really went to my dad for advice, because he wasn't around and that...um,...when you are kid you don't think about what you were going to ask. You think about I have this time, let me capitalize on this time by spending the time enjoying myself, doing whatever. So you don't make a mental note to say, hey, there is some questions that I have, I need you to answer them.

**S**How old were you in fifth grade? (8)

**D**Uh... About ten...I might have been eleven. So, yeah, I hadn't even reached puberty yet, so there was more questions that were going to come, so yeah, he killed himself because he felt like you know...my mom was the only women that he wanted to be with and she wasn't in the same place as him

**S**So they were separating?

**D**Yeah...They were separating, and I think that, based on him killing himself I realized some things...um... in regards to some dos and dont's, in regards to relationships,...um, and one of them was

(7) DB's statement on the suicide of his stepfather was perhaps the single most shocking moment of this interview. I was completely caught off-guard by it, as he had never mentioned it before. Shortly after I began to understand DB better, his focus on strength and teaching, his effort to be the best father in the world.

(8) Although I didn't want to let my curiosity drive me away from the focus of the interview, I also felt the suicide of DB's stepfather was potentially the key aspect to understanding DB's journey to RF, so I tried to get him to talk more about it and its impact in his life.

(9) The fact that DB's main lesson learnt from his stepfather's suicide was that he should get his own house was completely puzzling. I remember trying hard to think in my head how come that was possible,



um...you know, get your own house. Because he had to keep going home to his mom, once my...once my mum kicked him out. (9)

**SC**(Interview gets interrupted) So you were speaking about do's and don'ts in relationships, that you learnt from...(10)

**DB**Right. Just making sure that you have a place to lay your head where you are not – consistently going to back like your mom's house, because to a man continuously doing something like that is mentally degrading, not to mention you don't know what your mom thinks of something like that. So I promise that I would never get myself in a situation like that because I believe even if I didn't have the opportunity to talk to him before he killed himself, I believe that was like one of the key reasons why... why he decided that he was going to take his life because he felt like he was failure, like he wasn't as accomplished as he should have been. (11)

**SC**Okay

**DB**And part of it was based on the fact that he every time that he or my mom got into it he would have to return back to his mother's house. And you know, lot of men they looked at it as "once I leave, I'm not coming back, and if I do come back is just for a brief time before I have to go back to reclaim my duties as a man.

**SC**Um...Sounds like a devastating event though... (12)

**DB**It was really devastating. Like I said he was, my role model, you know?

**SC**So...your father...You did have contact with your biological father?

and where were the emotional pieces that seemed so obvious in such a traumatic event. Even reading this again now I am left somewhat in awe that this is the main conclusion drawn. I have tried to understand the importance of home ownership (or having a place to call one's own) in the context of his explanation, and although it makes sense it is hard not to think of it as a secondary lesson, not the main one.

(10) The interview got interrupted here by DB's boss, a white gentleman in his 40s-50s. Although he was kind to me and the interruption brief, I got the sense that he was checking on us, that he was not generally a kind boss, and that he did not particularly liked DB. I knew that DB was set to start working after the interview was done, so his bosses' visit added some urgency to the rest of the meeting, as I wanted to make sure I did not get DB in trouble, even if he had chosen the time and place of the interview.

(11) This last sentence gave me a better understanding of DB's conclusion that the main lesson learnt from his stepfather's suicide was that he should get a place of his own. The perception that having a place of one's own is a sign of success within poorer neighborhoods makes sense, and his assessment that he committed suicide because he felt like a failure seemed appropriate. Although I wanted to ask if there were other reasons why he may have felt a failure and how those had affected DB as a father, I restrained my impulse to ask and instead decided to let it go, as I wasn't sure how far I could push him.

(12) This comment was made on impulse, both out of my own inability to stop

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| <p><b>DB</b>I did.</p> <p><b>SC</b>Even after that.</p> <p><b>DB</b>Of course, of course. And still to this day.</p> <p><b>SC</b>And your relationship with him is good.</p> <p><b>DB</b>Now the relationship that I have with my dad is great. But it didn't come until I let him know how absent he was and him listening, and him understanding and you know, this was around the time that T. (first son) was, you know, on his way here, so you know now that he's here and now that I have kids, he sees how dedicated I am like you know, my kids comes first. So, me and him have a way better relationship... you know, not that it was a terrible relationship, but it was just a distant relationship. But now, we are very close, we speak on the phone almost everyday. (13)</p> <p><b>SC</b>How old is he?</p> <p><b>DB</b>My dad is 55.</p> <p><b>SC</b>And your mum and you have a good relationship also.</p> <p><b>DB</b>Me and my mom...if it wasn't for my mom I would have dropped out of school and so on and so forth, so my mom was most definitely my biggest supporter, being that there wasn't a assistant male, i.e. my father or my step dad that you know. I was born into - in my life I found myself always cutting up so I was always in trouble. But a lot of the things that I've seen in my early days is pretty much why I am who I am now. My mom volunteered, since I was in pre-school with me and my brother and my sister so I do it. You know, I've been volunteering for quite sometime. So I tried</p> | <p>thinking about the suicide, as well as a softer attempt to bring emotion back in the picture. I repented immediately after vocalizing it, as it did not add much to the discussion and I was not sure I had made it for the right reasons (it felt like I was trying to be a therapist instead of a researcher). Reading it now, it seems to have been pretty harmless, and provided another clue to the importance of DB's stepfather in his upbringing.</p> <p>(13) I was surprised by DB's statement that he let his father know how absent he was and that this, with the birth of his first son and his commitment to become a better father, triggered a better relationship between both. It was a personally humbling moment. I have not been able to do the same with my own father, who although was never totally absent, was certainly not involved. It makes me wonder now if it was the suicide of DB's stepfather that allowed for that conversation to have happened, or if it would have happened anyway. Perhaps more powerfully, what we see here is an instance of a son "giving birth" to the father. That is, it is the son that pulls the father into RF. Although with me this happened with the birth of my son, in the case of DB's father it seems to have happened later on, in the context of a conversation with DB about how absent DB's father was.</p> |
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to let them see my accomplishments in regard to helping others as much as I can, especially my mom because out of her three kids I was the problem child. (14)

**SC**Growing up?

**DB**Growing up I was a problem child, I was the middle child and I wanted attention and if I didn't get it, they'd be hell to pay. So her seeing me now compared to, you know, when I was younger is a completely 360 degree turn. And I always wanted her to know that my goal is to stay a winner, on the positive, because there was many days where she didn't know, where I was, what I was doing, whether I was alive and then there were some days she wished she didn't know what I was doing, because I was such a negative person, so.

**SC**And you see that also influencing how you are with your...?

**DB**Yes. (laughs) I'm strict, you know, I'm strict especially when it comes to T. you know, my daughter...she is younger, but when it comes to T. I'm strict you know, there is some things I am just not going to tolerate, you know. Education is most definitely probably the most important thing that he has to put forth in his life, you know, wrestling, videos games, all of that, that can come later. My motto to him is "do what you are supposed to do, and if you do it, you know, if you do what you're suppose to do, then you can do what you want to do but most definitely you have to do what you're suppose to do. So, he understands... He probably wishes that I wasn't so strict compared to his mom, she is really not that strict, she tries to be his friend and so forth and I notice that there is not a lot of respect there for her. (15)

**SC**Okay...Um...Certainly I can see how

(14) Despite the continuous focus on fatherhood and responsibility, reading DB's depiction of his mother -as well as listening to other participant's in the program- makes me think that mothers are too often getting short changed in the conversation about responsibility and parenting. In the same vein as feminism's general claim that we don't need to bring irresponsible father's back into the picture, but help to find ways to support responsible mothers who are carrying singlehandedly the weight of raising up children, I feel fathers could learn a lot about these mothers who fight so hard and get such little praise for what they do.

(15) There is an association between discipline and respect here that gets utilized as a way to differentiate himself from the type of parent DB's son's mother is. I remember at the time of the interview that the slightly negative depiction of the mother of his child made me somewhat uncomfortable. As a rule, my own parents rarely spoke about each other, and when they did, they usually avoided doing so negatively. Of course, that was in front of me. DB's son was not present in the interview, so in that context it seems rather harmless, but it still made me think it was relatively unfair at the time.

both your stepfather and father influenced those ideas of presence...um...being a role model... Teaching also, or was that coming more from your mom?

**DB**No, it would have come from all, because I mean of course she, she was teaching me, you know, the fundamentals of, you know, reading math and so on and so forth but they taught me the blueprint of life, the blueprint of what a man should do, whether it was moral from my mistakes or learn it from there the words or learn it from their hands on blessings, it was all education you know. So, yeah. (16)

**SC**So... Just to clarify, the most important aspect of being a responsible fatherhood...it sounds at least for you is presence, being there...

**DB**Have to be present and you have to constantly know that you're educating, you have to be aware that you are educating all the time, you know, because like I said negative can either be negative lesson learnt, whether it is a negative lesson learnt on a gain meaning, I'm not going to do that because I've seen the outcome or negative lesson gained I'm going to do that because it look like a good thing to do but at the end of course the consequences will come through and you're sitting somewhere where you don't want to be. That happens a lot, the whole negative lesson gained in regards to you not seeing the outcome. A lot of black guys, young black males see the hustlers and they are like "Hey...I want to do that." But they don't see the hustler getting held away to jail, they just see the hustler coming back to the streets after time off. but if you wasn't counting how long he was gone you don't think it's long at all.

**SC**Were you one of those? (17)

(16) DB makes an important distinction here between what his mother vs. his stepfather and father taught him that I did not initially catch but seems extremely important in terms of gender roles. DB seems to place a higher value in the "blueprint of life" lessons taught by the male figures in his family than the math/reading teaching that his mother did. In re-reading it it seems to place mother's teaching at a lower rank, and plays into a conception of the different roles between a father and a mother. The father as a moral guide, the mother as a day-to-day fighter in more concrete yet perhaps smaller (?) battles.

(17) This question came across as awkward at the time, and still does. It was a moment that although brief, highlighted

**DB**One of those...?

**SC**Were you a hustler.

**DB**At one point, I mean at one point I most definitely did sell drugs but I felt bad that I was doing it because I was blessed, my mom, my dad, my stepmom, they never did you know crack cocaine, which is the, you know, it's the community killer...crack cocaine whatever like, you know weed is not a (laughs)...weed is not going to kill a community, you know. Crack cocaine, heroin, so on a so forth, those are what, you know, mess up the home and drive a wedge through families.

**SC**Did it in yours?

**DB**It did not in mine, which was a beautiful thing that I didn't, because I could have been, I easily could have been a top drug dealer, easily. But morally it wasn't right, because I looked at the bigger picture, I looked at the someone has to suffer aspect of that... going up to people's houses seeing that there were kids suffering, there were, you know, how people were suffering based on the fact that there were dads that decided, you know, "I'm going to sell crack" (18)

**SC**So there is also an experiential component there...What you saw in other people's families influenced...

**DB**Exactly. And you know, there was a whole bunch of things all rolled up, but ultimately it got me to a point where it was like "that's not the thing to do," even I did for you know, my reasons, that's not the thing to do you know, yeah.

**SC**How do you... You have both a father and stepfather, and both quite important at different points in your life, it sounds like,

the racial difference between us. The experience of hustling seemed so foreign to me I even resisted mentioning the word in the initial question. DB's answer doesn't let me off the hook and pushes me to clarify. I remembered thinking how strange the term sounded coming from me, as if I was trying a new dish, or participating in something foreign and strange for the first time. In later interviews I began using it loosely.

(18) DB's words here betray, in my eyes, how the drug culture within inner city neighborhoods is both a source of shame and a source of pride (in the sense that being a good drug dealer is tied to success). DB mentions proudly that he could have been a "top drug dealer" adding "easily," as a way to perhaps accentuate his skill or potential. He was almost telling me with nostalgia, even if he was quick to accentuate the moral reasons why he chose otherwise. It is, as I see it, one of the challenges of RF programs working with males in inner city poor neighborhoods, how to provide ways for males to succeed in both economic and emotional ways that rival those offered by drug economies.

and problematic maybe at others...but, what role do you then biology playing, I mean, your father was the biological father, and you also had a step father, who sounds like was as a good role model, certainly with a tragic end but a good role model. So is fatherhood biology or what you say is a....

**DBI** would say wherever you can get the information from wherever you take it is what would make you, you know... of course you take the nutrients and do away with the things that can cause some type of harm, I mean, you take the meat and spit out the bones with regards the information that you receive from whoever whether it would be your father, your step father or the local parent, the local drug dealer. I think that's one thing that's embedded and I really can't say, you know, for just blacks or whatever I think that's just embedded. And any young man take the meat and spit out the bone, in regards to how you dissect your vision of what a man should be. So it might be you know through your genes that you know there is just, deadbeats...I mean, some people will say..I've heard my cousin say, "my dad ain't nothing, I'm going to be nothing, my son will be nothing." You know... And you sit and say, "wow." I guess if you consistently put this into your sons and there can be a possibility, but as long as there is people out here that are letting him know differently, then he still has hope to be more of a success.

**SC**So you are certainly pointing more to a choice. Fatherhood as a choice...

**DB**There's always going to be a choice, That's just...that's just how it is, every decision is based on consequences. Some people don't look at it like that, some people look at it as, this is fate, this is what I'm destined to be. So let me accept that. I don't, you know, knock people for thinking

that, but if you let me your ear, I'll tell you my point of view. And hopefully it is not too late for you... because some people can change. I am living proof in regards to whenever I was young and the things that I did I am not that person anymore, but there is also people that I have took under my wing and noticed that... the biggest problem that they had was, they always wondered why they can never get ahead the way they wanted to and...and I will tell him, you know, if you don't take care of your kid -and this is just my vision, this is just, you know, the way I look at life- if you will not take care your kids, life doesn't want to take care of you either. And so...So it took them a while, but...you know, a lot of the guys that I spoke this to just don't understand like...this is true, you know, and I think there is no greater joy than you know, getting paid, but knowing that your money is going towards the kids. You know... even if they don't appreciate it, they say, "oh, man... come on man, you need to be more excited about this,"... ultimately they will most definitely show you appreciation, it's not just a... stubbing your fingers kind of thing, sometimes it takes a while, but you are – you're loved. You might not be as excited as you once were but you accept that and it puts you at, you know, the state of mind where, you know..."okay, I finally got the thank you and appreciation that I was looking for" (19)

**SC**What are some of the... You know, you pointed at some of the people that you know that are not the fathers they should be.

**DB**Right.

**SC**So what are things that get in the way of being a responsible father.

(19) DB's conception of fathering as a choice resonated profoundly with mine. Although given his story I expected him to point to choice as important, I did not expect DB to make such a point of it. I think this was because I associated the position of highlighting gender differences and advocating for the role of fathers as unique with an overall vision of parenthood in which biology has a dominant role, that is, to be a father or a mother is to be biologically so. But I guess in an environment in which so many do not live up to their responsibilities as fathers, choice acquires more importance as an explanatory narrative of both absence and presence.



**DB**Um... (exhales deeply)... One of them of course is we try to live up to whatever you try to live up to, rather as to the "flyest-guy" or...you know... the guy that has the most money, the guy that has the most females, and sometimes it is just simple as "I tried and it's not working" based on the fact that you know you felt like you was doing all you could, and you thought you and your child's mother were on the same page in regards to how you all gonna raise the kid, and... she gets upset at something that you did or did not do, she takes the child with your wife and you feel like you can't fight because you don't have everything that can back you and so on and so forth, or it can just be simple as, my... my situation where I feel like...you know I am doing, I am doing, what I need to do. And you go to family division and you're told you are not doing nowhere near as much as you need to do based on the fact that what she said is true and, you have to prove yourself. So you think "I give up" I am not... you know I am not dealing with this no more, you know, good luck kids, and whenever you – you know, get older, we can have our talk and I can explain to you how crummy your mother was—but just like... you can't really go off of that. But a lot of guys do, a lot of guys say, I ain't giving you no money, I didn't get you nottin' for Christmas, Child support payed for your Christmas, and I have heard guys say that – and that's... it is dissapointing.  
(20)

**SC**So you mentioned three things that are getting in the way of being a responsible father... the first is sort of... wanting to be...

**DB**Flashy.

**SC**Yeah... something else. So there is this image... what it is, you know, whatever it

(20) I felt from here on that I needed to tread carefully as it was obvious that DB's experience with the court system had marked him, and he had strong opinions about it. When asked about things that get in the way of becoming a responsible father he seems to initially go in the direction of culture but then points primarily at the court system and women. The image he provides in regards to the latter is telling: women are gatekeepers, and punish men by taking the kids away. This portrayal did not surprise me, but again made me uncomfortable. Although DB mentions the source of disagreement between his child's mother and him as being over how to raise their child, I kept on thinking than in a majority of cases it might not be that way, and that the separation may arise from a failure of men to live up to the expectations of fatherhood and responsibility before their separation.



is... how you look, what it is that you have, material possessions, street cred, whatever, so that gets in the way of being the responsible father... And that was one. You mentioned also that the man is not performing his family obligations, and so the partner, the woman -married or not- says you are not... you know... takes child away or something

**DB**Right...and it doesn't even have to be that they are not performing in their family, it can be something as simple as... because of a disagreement, because the first thing that a woman does whenever there is an altercation between that the mother and father is to take the kid away. So that's the first thing that they will do, they will most definitely try to take the kid away to penalize the man. And this is probably one of that, this is probably one of the biggest ones, even though family division is... (21)

**SC**a-ha...That was going to be the third one.

**DB**That is the third. Family division is probably the top one. where guys are like... I throw my hands up because... I tried, you know... we didn't really need to go to anybody else to... you know, work out how we were going to take care of our child, and whenever they get you know, whenever the mother gets you know family division involved a lot of guys throw their hands up, and they are like, oh well, let them do what they have to do and I'll just be off somewhere. So a lot of people look at it as... This is what it is. A lot of people are getting the information from the women. So when you get the information from the women there is probably more emotions involved and I am a firm believer that when there is more emotion involved and lot of things, a lot of things were fabricated, a lot of things were exaggerated

(21) This last exchange is telling. I attempted to introduce the possibility that men may not be living up to the expectations of fathering before the separation from their partners, and DB was quick to correct me, discounting the idea of a failure on the man's part and highlighting the fact that the power of women is that they can take the children away, which is the "first thing that they will do" to get back at the men in a "simple" disagreement. The demonizing of women, seems to me, again, to be profoundly unfair, even if I don't doubt that there are cases in which the situation described by DB is accurate

(22) Again, and in the spirit of the gender-war theme, DB highlights a vocalized essential difference between men and women. Women are more emotional – which is described within this context as a negative, as it leads to fabrication and exaggeration– while men are more

and a lot of things are sold to a point where they are the victim. (22)

SCOkay

**DB**And when this happens of course the next thing that you do is you know like anybody really, male or female is, let's play hero, – let's stick it to... you know this guy, cause he hurt this woman and he hurt this child, so that's like the biggest one and that's why the family guys are throwing their hands up like...I'm not, you know... And the second one is you know of course... this simple disagreement can lead to the woman either packing up his stuff and kicking him out or packing up her stuff and moving somewhere.

SCOkay, so in those three you mentioned... in those three, how does race play into all of those?

**DB**Um...Race plays into it based on...

SCIf...I mean if it does in your mind...

**DB**It does. It does... Because you know, it plays a part based on the... majority. I mean the majority of people that are having these problems are blacks.

SCOkay

**DB**So that plays a part because once these applications are being submitted into family division you know of course you fill out the information and on pretty much any application it asks what your race is, and it's like... after a while you don't have a person with a fair mind saying another male... now they are putting more into it...like another black male. You know and again looking into where they are residing at...another black male, another black woman, black community...(23)

rational. In a world where reason is valued over emotion, the implications are clear.

(23) DB took an interesting take in my eyes on the question of race. DB explains that race plays a factor because the majority of individuals experiencing the problems listed are black (a circular argument) and then goes on to describe the impact that being black has in a system that too often works on stereotypes and discriminates based on race. This leads to a deeper exploration of his own experience with the legal system, where race evidently played a role. Although we will return

**SC**So it plays into a whole range of stereotypes about...

**DBA** whole range. And before you know it, it's like – do we even have to really read this whole application.

**SC**So it certainly feels like that makes it much more unfair of a process.

**DB**It is most definitely an unfair process, and I've always verbalized from that one time going down there in regards to being sued for child support that...family division first and foremost when you break the words down you have a family and then you have the word division, which is to divide, and it's like before you walk in there, you can walk in there as a shaky family that isn't whole, but you'll walk out divided for sure because no one no... once a man sees what his fate is based on what he thought his responsibilities were, you are divided, you're divided because 90% of the time -I mean there is 10% of the time they'll rule in favour of the child's father- but just like the lady said whenever we were down there because, you know, the mom was like...why he is a good guy and this and that and the third.... and the lady looked at her and was like, there is nothing you can do now, because you opened that you opened the fly gates, you made us believe that you know this guy wasn't taking care of his responsibilities. So I mean, with that what they – I look at it is – it's like a juggernaut like... what they say goes, you know, that's one of those situations where is like, they have their mind made up even before you get there, that you are going to pay, that you are going to owe, and that's you are going to continue to pay and if you don't pay you are going to continue to owe, and if you have to continue to owe sooner or later you

consistently to the question of race\* from here on, he never dwells any further in historical causes or communicates an overall explanatory hypothesis of why absent fatherhood is consistently reported as affecting black fathers the most. I remember thinking at the time of the interview that the lack of a more consistent and complete explanatory hypothesis (or a challenging stand to the question of race) precludes the possibility of truly addressing or challenging the problem.

keep coming down here come we are going to take your freedom away from you. Regardless if you have all the proof in the world from receipts to whatever it's all irrelevant because their mind was already made up... You are going to pay.

**SC**You mean proof that you have been paying.

**DB**Proof that you – not proof that you have been paying, proof that you have been doing which you was supposed to in regards to taking care of your child.

**SC**Okay.

**DB**You know...paying of course, you know, they can't fight that, but their unknowing, and their lack of caring in regards to I can have a whole, you know, big huge box full of receipts, it's not worth anything, you can show them your receipts until their eyes pop out of their head but that's not proof to them no more.

**SC**So this is a very black and white issue in terms of the.. the way that you are explaining that is either you pay child support or you haven't. We are not as concerned about the shades of grey or whether you've been taking care of your child

**DB**Right

**SC**And whether you've been doing things paying for school books and clothes... Those kind of receipts.

**DB**They don't care, so it's like if you don't care about what's mostly, mainly important which is I'm doing my job, I don't need you to take money from me in order for me to provide for this child. I'm going to provide for this child because this is what I

(24) This is the first time that the term "deadbeat dad" is used. It culminates an exchange that represents quite well the claims of many researchers that the child-support and legal system does a poor job of accounting for the many ways in which

want to do, this is what I decided to do and this is what I'm going to continue to do, they don't care because once you are in that system you are a deadbeat, you are a deadbeat dad (24)

**SC** So your entrance as a black father into the system because of the supposition that you are coming because of family related issues this immediately makes you into a deadbeat.

**DB** Makes you into a deadbeat.

**SC** Um... So race plays a very important role there.

**DB** It plays a very important role because... we are already upset, you know we have, I mean Blacks we have short tempers, you know, this is in us, we have very short tempers. So whatever we tried to do to not be put in a situation, and we thought that we were doing it, until we get that letter in a mail saying that we have to report, it transform everything. So we can think that we're doing great, it's not the best but is, you know, miles away from the worst, and do need the letter stating you have to go down to family division, you have to, you know, sit in front of the judge, and... ultimately you will have to pay, walk in here as a man guarantees you will walk out as a mouse, because that is what a mouse is, a mouse is a deadbeat dad, you know, and that's how you they look at you based on what the mother is doing and if she is not communicating with you – when you finally do find out you are going to start to dislike her too based on your temper, and based on how you present yourself – because you are going to get it regardless. Based on how you present yourself depicts how much money extra you have to pay, and it's not fair, it's not fair. (25)

fathers are often present and may contribute economically to the child's development, particularly within black communities. His depiction of family division as a "juggernaut" was telling and highlights its perceived power over families.

(25) The metaphor of the mouse, coupled with the previous of a "juggernaut" create such a powerful negative image of Family Division that upon hearing it I was also driven under its spell, seeing it as almost a family-eating monster. It was a powerful moment in the interview because it was obvious that the experience had left DB marked, and that he saw Family Division as an enemy of black fathers. His statement to the fact that black fathers have short tempers ("this is in us") is also remarkable in that he seems to be pointing to some type of biological/essential difference, that is, anger is the result of some type of biological inheritance tied to race, and not of shared circumstance.

**SC**Have you had to go back again?

**DB**The only reason that we had to go back was for a custody hearing, so it is in the same building but of course it's not the...

**SC**Do you have costudy or does she have custody?

**DB**I have full custody.

**SC**Okay. And that was how long... how long after did you get full custody?

**DB**I got full custody when he was 2

**SC**And you had to go the first time...

**DB**I had to go the first time when he was 1. So a year after I had to go down...

**SC**Why did you win custody?

**DB**It's one of those – it's one of those situations where some people will look at it like "Oh, you are back stabber," and some people will say you did what you had to do, I feel like I did what I had to do based on the fact that she didn't need to do that, it was based on greed, you know, and...

**SC**You mean she didn't need to ask for child support the first time.

**DB**Right. It was based on greed...And, um... she had another child and i remember telling her listen, you know, I'm working this job and... I'm sorry three, I'm sorry it's about two years. I got this job and they're taking benefits off from me, for him and they are taking child support out of my check and I'm coming home with nothing, and you are telling me you have so many food stamps, this and that and the third, that you are giving them away, and it's

Like... he is with me all the time, we are not using your food stamps to eat, I'm paying with cash. So, you know, I broke things down to her and we decided that we would go down to welfare. And we went down there... I never forget it. Like I said, she had a daughter. The lady looked at her and looked at me and said um...we can't take him off and leave his sister on. First and foremost that's unfair to that child-- and second of all they are on the same grant, these two kids are on the same grant, and so you can't take one off and leave one on because this is unfair to the child. So I looked at that lady on the face and said you mean to tell me I'm being penalized for her having another child by somebody else because that's how I felt. And she looked at me and said, yeah, pretty much. So the only thing that she was able to do to stop them from suing me was to go over to the the county building and sign over her rights to me, and family division cut, stop suing me for child support. The only way that that would have gone through was if I would have went down and made it legit. And that's what I decided to do make it legit, and she was pissed because I made it legit, but I don't... I don't regret it at all.

**SC**Do you talk to her...do you have a relationship with her?

**DB**Yes, yes, yes. She gets visitation. Do we get along? We don't. She can't stand me. But I told her...you don't have to like me, you know, you can hate me, you know, you can wish I was dead, but I think at the end of day we're a team and we are playing for him. It is that simple, she doesn't...she doesn't approve it, she tries to fight me, you know, it seems like we're on court every year whenever it's time for her to, you know, appeal the custody order.

**SC**So you guys are in court still regularly...

(26) A range of issues are present in this exchange. DB's story seems to reinforce a particular vision of poor women on welfare as taking advantage of the system (and bragging about it). It is a story I have heard often within other circles, of poor women "milking" or "playing" the system, and it is a story that always comes with specific examples as illustrations that are remarkable in their suggestive power. I am reminded here of bell hooks' (2000) statement that there is in certain circles of society a hatred for the poor that borders

**DB**(laughs) She hasn't took me to court yet, I'm waiting till around October.(26)

**SC**Okay. So all of this was obviously about your experience with the system and with family court and family division and custody and all those things and we're talking about how race played in factor in there and you have mentioned the other two factors that you thought got in the way of being the responsible father were trying to be "fly" or have women... things like that. And the other one the decisions of the mother... that parental conflict leading to the mother taking the child away as way to...

**DB**Get back at the father.

**SC**Get back at the father. And so... in those two do you see race playing a factor?

**DB**Yes. In regards to the mother taking the child away, race plays a factor in a couple of different scenarios, one of course is a lot of guys that they'll want to go in the straight n' narrow, rather...you know, they was hustling and never been caught, or been caught trying to clean up whatever, they found that um... and that was some that I always thought was happening but I was like um... I don't know. The applying for a job scenario, where a black man can go and apply for the same job as a black women, and the black women would get the job before a black man. So the black man is trying to get these jobs, and he keeps coming up empty and now his girl or his wife or his fiancé come in and how come say "I got a job." And I didn't even put forth as much effort as you did, I didn't put forth as much time as you did.What do you think that black man will feel like? He will feel like she is trying to down him and they'll get into it or whatever... and now she

on pathological hysteria . It is a hatred that is perpetuated by an image of the poor as leeches, unfairly living off others who have -in the public imagination- simply worked harder for what they've achieved. I am also reminded here of a bumper sticker I have seen a couple of times in random cars that irks me in its unapologetic meanness ("Work harder, those on welfare need you"). And despite all the negative associations I am also sympathetic with DB, as his example is also -like others I have heard- powerful. And yet I wondered, what would she say about him? How would she describe the situation?

There is also a vision here of fathers as the victims of a system that is set up against them from the start. And yet, DB got custody (a fact that would seem to support those who argue from a feminist standpoint that the family court bias in favor women is actually false and that the numbers do not support it -that in fact men are typically the beneficiaries of custody hearings across the country). Whatever the case, I remember being moved by DB's team metaphor of parenting as his willingness to leave differences aside for the benefit of his son. Of course, that stand is always easier when you are in the most powerful position.



got her own form of income, what good as he. Because as long as you remember, the first mission that a man was to have – once he became a man, was to become a provider. Now she got a job, now she is the provider, so it's like, what good are you? You know...And that's what plays a part in regards to race because a lot of times is hard and it is easy for people to have jobs to say it is easy to get a job until you are back on the job hunt and you realize is hard. It's hard and –

**SC**So what you are saying is that it is even harder for a black man.

**DB**It is harder for a black man, a lot of times, to get jobs.

**SC**In general and also versus black women?

**DB**Versus black woman. They won't get the job. I mean – it goes to...it goes to stereotypes in regards to male-female also. Of course, we know this stereotype is females are smarter than males or they mature faster than males on so on and so forth. So it's like well if I had to choose and I'm the employer and the only options I have was the black man or black woman, I'm going to take the black woman. Black woman learn faster. Black women this, black... you know. In regards to it might just be woman learn faster, but if you only had these two options, you will say black woman are potentially going to learn faster. Whatever...Then there was any type of altercations at the job, I rather have a woman than the angry black man. (27)

**SC**Okay. So that's what gets in the way? You are saying in terms of the difference of why a black woman might get hired over a black man is this stereotype of the angry black man.

(27) Although I asked about race in this exchange, DB did something that caught me off guard by positioning himself against black women, and speaking of discrimination specifically in relation to women. The reason black men can't get jobs and become providers is not simply because of discrimination based on race – although he gets to this through the back door– but, as he goes on to explain, because of competition with black women who do not have to deal with the stereotype of being “angry.” I wondered at the time, (and continue to do so as I reread this) if his positioning against women was not in a way seeking to form an alliance with me based on gender as opposed to race. When I asked about the difficulties of black men in the labor market, and if these were experienced in general or specifically vs. Black women he very clearly went in the direction of pointing to black women. Again, this seems to me to be a challenge for the RF movement, the

**DB**The angry black man, the more educated black woman, or the over-educated black man, why are you applying for a job that you are over-qualified for? I mean my brother is going through that right now, one of my older brothers is over-qualified of a lot of the jobs he is applying for it and he is just not getting.

**SC**Because he is over-qualified.

**DB**Because he is a over-qualified black man. So you start to question, why do you want to work here over-qualified black man? Why? What happened in your life when you feel like you need to apply for something that is less than what you are qualified for. So it's like "Okay, you don't get this offer," we will bring that for interview, because we are curious and we want to know why. We want to know why you want to work at a job that you are over-qualified for. So yeah. Race plays a part...(28)

**SC**What about the other third one? You were referring there to the one in terms of conflict...partner – couple-partner conflict, and the third one was this idea of being fly. I mean, the first one that you mentioned that we haven't addressed.

**DB**The one is being fly is...um, that is just black's culture. The whole statement "trying to keep up with the Jones" is a black statement. When you are doing this, you've got to be – Well, nine times out of ten, if you are trying to be that dude –that's what they're considered, that dude- there is only really one way to do it in a black community, and that is to hustle. (29)

**SC**By hustle you mean...

**DB**Sell drugs. And of course, if you

sorting out of who shares the blame for what difficulties.

(28) We did not explore this any further, but I was surprised that he identified the reason that his brother cannot find jobs as laying primarily on being an "overqualified" black men, not on simply being a black men. In a way I got the sense that he was sugarcoating what might have been blatant discrimination, that is, that the adjective "overqualified" to cushion what sounds like simply discrimination based on race.

(29) I found interesting how DB appropriated the statement "keeping up with the Joneses," mentioning that it was a black statement (it is not, at least in terms of how it originated and the way that it has been used, which is associated more with white capitalist culture). The word hustle, a word that I intuitively understood, but was not entirely familiar with, came up again here, and this time I was able to directly ask about it, satisfying my curiosity and confirming what I thought it referred to.

continue to hustle, and the police, they see you and they talk to another partner on another shift and they say, yes I've seen them guys to. And they talk to another partner in another shift and they say, yeah... I've seen them guys to. They never go to work and they got the freshest gear on and the newest stuff. What do you think... what did you think the police are going to think you are doing? Selling drugs. And when they believe this, they'll start to look into it even more and before you know it, they'll start to arrest each young man and... there might be a time – let's just say that this guy is not even a hustler, let's just say he is sitting around guys that are hustlers. They don't check to see if a person knows how to fill out an application, they don't check to see if a person has a pay stub to prove that he is – you know what I'm saying? Let's just say times got hard and he decided that he didn't need to make an extra actual couple dollars. And he was constantly being harassed by the police, and they finally found something on him... They are never going to let up. So once you get out of jail, after being put in there for doing something that you weren't supposed to do, once you are on parole, you have guidelines that you have to follow. And if you don't follow these guidelines under this parole, memorandum..listen, you have to do this, you have to do that, you can't do this, and you can't do that. So now your girl is like "hey.... them days are over" and you might agree to them days are over too. But police don't. And every time you violate parole, you got to do time. Your girl's gonna leave you, or she is going to find somebody else or you just going to tell her I can't...we can't do this, and that leaves the child as the biggest victim.

**SCS** So obviously the "keeping up with the Joneses," the being "fly," all of that...

within black communities, the way that it plays with race is that within... Within black communities, the only way to keep that race up is through hustling, selling drugs...

**DB**Nine times out of ten, yeah...

**SC**And if that is the only possibility it comes with the consequences of bringing the police in, possible incarceration, being on parole, parole violations...

**DB**...being away and so on and so forth... But there are sometimes where you know there are guys that hustle, make enough money that they never got caught before, but of course you already know. A lot of guys wants to stick around, hang around their old friends. And that was just one scenario. But I mean of course you know, a guy that hustled, did this thing, made enough money to where he can start his own business, or got an inheritance from somebody but always lived in the hood, still had the same friends that did hustle. Now... police come, somebody got to take claim for whatever is lying on this ground, and it just happens to be closer to the person that has never touched it before. Can't snitch... so you got to take the hit. You take the hit and now you are going down. Same thing with parole. You want to stay away from them kind of people. But how many people in the hood can anybody honestly say they report, "Hey listen, I know you just got on parole, so I'm not even going to come around you because I have this gun on me because people don't like me. So they want to kill me and I rather be judged by 12 than carried by 6, you do understand?" Doesn't happen. So now, the police are coming again and your sole friend got around and he had crack cocaine or had a gun on him. Now you are not allowed to be around

(30) DB's depiction here how "keeping up with the Joneses" translates into hustling and the ways in which this activity is embedded into the economy within poor black neighborhoods was not new to me. Neither was the interaction with the police as described or the way in which somebody trying to get out of the game may still be in trouble. And yet there was something very genuine about the way in which DB formulated the narrative that was captivating... It highlighted the extent to which hustling is integrated into the normal neighborhood life in certain areas, and how even if you are not part of the game, you come in regular contact with it as part of your daily life by merely living there, and you risk therefore getting arrested, etc. Two sentences caught my attention at the time and stayed with me after the interview: "Can't snitch, so you got to take the hit" and "Rather be judged by 12 than carried by 6." The catchy phrases point to laws that form the daily interaction with hustling: Snitching as one of the worst possible neighborhood crimes and death as a very real possibility of the game. Finally, there is race. Again, nothing new here in regards to the facts. DB highlights the role race plays in stereotyping by police, a often discussed and well-known fact. But I was again surprised at the assumption of blacks

none of that kind of stuff, so where are you going back to? Going back to jail. And one thing, when I say it plays a major part it's because in my 31 years that I've been alive, living in poverty stricken areas, the ones that do most of the harassing isn't the plain clothes, uniform cops...it's the task force, it's the ATF. And 99% of them are not black and race plays a factor. No one can tell me that race doesn't play a factor because I've been in situations where they looked at me like "you're black, so you are up to no good." Until I tell them, "I'm clean as whistle baby, you know what I'm saying?" and they still found ways to get under your skin because they know blacks have short tempers. So they keep working you and working you and that's what normally happens. (30)

**SC**Have you been incarcerated?

**DB**Umm... No. I've never done major time. I've been...

**SC**Arrested?

**DB**Arrested before. But I never did no kind of major time at all. Which is, you know, to me...it's a great thing. But... I mean...

**SC**But it was there where you lived. It was there where you grew up?

**DB**Yeah. Opportunities to be incarcerated where I live is – probably is high, is just, like the opportunity to walk out of the house and dying. Both those things can happen, like... within the blink of an eye in these communities, going to jail. You can go to jail and you just sitting down like, what the hell did I do to get in jail? And there is times where it's just like, how did I just come outside, to get fresh air in, and a bullet just passed my head. That is something that can happen any given day.

having “short tempers” which is not discussed in the context of historical and daily discrimination, a life in poverty, stress, etc. but is assumed as something that blacks “have,” almost an essential or biological trait that differentiates them from other racial groups.

(31) As I re-read this, Newt Gingrich, a potential 2012 presidential candidate from the republican party has made a statement in an interview about how poverty in America is the result of the poor working habits of the poor, who are not used to used to exchanging labor for money unless it involves illegal activities. Although the comment is ideologically telling and can be deconstructed in a variety of ways beyond the theme of this dissertation, it is the unbelievable day-to-

(31)

**SC**Okay... It is 2:50. Do you have a little bit more time?

**DB**Yeah.. Until three.

**SC**Umm. Okay... So up until now you have implied that to you a father is necessary.

**DB**Yeah.

**SC**You need to have a father... for a child. Wherher it is a boy or a girl.

**DB**Yes. I'm not one want to listen to the whole "takes a man to raise a man," and nor do I listen to the whole, "it takes a woman to raise a woman." I don't believe in those. What I believe in is, with any child given any circumstances, the child has to be hungry enough to go and seek the information that they need. As a man, you shall never want your child to seek information from someone else, because sometimes that information that they get might jeopardize them, their family, their livelihood, you should always want to be mindful, that, you know... and I tell people all the time, no one else is there to be T's role model, that's my job. So, in earnest, I think that's the same way, no other male deserves to be his role model and that's the same way with my daughter D., no other male deserves to be her role model and I'm it and there is never going to be a change in that. I'll always be the dominant role model. So I always have to be mindful of what I do, when I do it, what I say, how I say it because there can be negative effects.

**SC**Is there a role that you... So obviously you are a role model, but, is that role model different because you are man than, say, a woman. Is there something that you do, that you are, that is different than a

day stress of regular life in poor neighborhoods where hustling is the major economy that DB points to that so often gets forgotten about by people like Newt (in his case, amongst many other things). Comments like DB's here are shocking because of the naturalness with which they are pronounced. What does it mean to be a father in a context like this? In my mind it can only be terrifying, the source of unending stress... And yet, as DB's comment points to, when it is one's day-to-day life, it becomes normal.

(32) DB's interview was surprising in a number of ways. I had heard DB speak at meetings many times, and was aware of some of his opinions on fatherhood, as well as being familiar with his overall

woman?

**DB**I would say the strength part but then again, I know a lot of strong...almost every single one of my family members -female family members- are like, extremely strong. But, making sure that, they know that I'm most definitely the king of the pride, like showing him how to control the environment. Can a woman do it? I'm sure, will it be more nurturing? Possibly. Yeah But I wouldn't cheat, T or D out from lessons taught by their moms, because they do have to be there – they... I tell people all the time even though I do have full custody of T,, he still needs his mother. So, no. I don't think that... I just think it's a different, so different. It's the same lesson, but it's been taught differently from male and females. It is the same lesson, which is being taught differently. (32)

**SC**You mean the lesson of strength?

**DB**Strength. Yes...Strength. And I think all lessons.

**SC**So there is no difference because of gender.

**DB**It is just being taught different.

**SC**Oh...So the content is not different. The way that it is taught is different.

**DB**Yes.

**SC**And you think that comes with more nurture on the side...

**DB**Yeah... Yeah. I'm sure there is more nurture. If there's a lesson how to ride a bike, the male would be "get back on the bike, do it again," the female, "oh, Do you need band aid," it's like, you know don't focus on the band aid, you are really not

style (DB was never afraid to speak up or let everyone know his opinion on things). But during the interview there was a couple of moments -this being one of them- where DB surprised me with his stand on things we were discussing. DB almost eliminates gender as a factor in raising a child (after some discussion it becomes evident that he associates nurture more with mothers, and toughness with fathers), and is able to give credit to women on their strength without being pushed on it –something rare in the men attending groups, who more often demonized women than praised them. Although, again, it is obvious his relationship with his son's mother is not good, he is still able to acknowledge her importance in the life of his son.

I am also surprised in rereading this by how important it is that DB's children have him as the role model, as the source of most information about life. Although it makes sense for any father to feel that way, in a context where hustling, violence, gangs, etc. are daily aspects of a family's life, being the sole role model acquires much more importance. When taking his context into account, a statement like "you shall never want your child to seek information from someone else, because sometimes that information that they get might jeopardize them, their family, their livelihood" makes so much sense and becomes profoundly moving. Finally, DB's statement that he is the "king of the pride" came across differently than it might have had I not known that Disney's movie "The Lion King" was his favorite movie of all time (it is also the favorite movie of many of the fathers attending groups). Because I was aware of this, his comment made me smile...



hurt, you know.

**SC**So there is a sense of toughness maybe coming more from the father.

**DB**Right

**SC**And more nurture from the mother.

Um... you are not married to your current girlfriend. But you are living together. So you are co-habiting? Is that...

**DB**Yeah...

**SC**Or do you live in different places?

**DB**She has her own house. But she spends most of her time at mine.

**SC**Okay. How do you see the role of marriage in responsible fatherhood?

**DB**To me it's like... I don't know. When it comes to marriage, to me is not a pressing issue. The most important thing is getting along, and if you're not, for the sake of the children agree to disagree and keep them moving. It is like the case where people do get married and then they realize they can't stand each other and once the divorce comes the first person that thinks is their fault is the child. As long as you can maintain a healthy relationship, a healthy environment, going by law if you're together long enough, you're legally married anyway, so why do this whole song and dance that a lot of times it ends up in a disappointed finish.

**SC**So you would be on the side that says marriage is not one of the keys to responsible fatherhood within black communities.

**DB**I would say, yes marriage is not one of the keys – just present, being present.

(33) This entire exchange on marriage is telling. DB privileges presence over



Because even with divorce – a lot of guys that are divorced, I don't know, but they let the woman say "I'm taking the kid", and it is just like... you don't have more rights to the kids than I do, but they find their selves letting the woman take the kids and a lot of times whenever there are situations where there is divorce, a woman being bitter or whatever, she can tell the kids whatever she wants and the kids are sponges... you can literally -based on what age they are- you can brainwash the kids into thinking whatever. So now that the divorce comes, and you finally have that opportunity to just sit down with your own children and talk about anything, and one of the things that they possible want to talk about is, "why did you and mom get a divorce? because from, what she's saying, it's all your fault." Now, when I had the conversation with T. about his mom, I could simply use "It wasn't working out" and put a little bit of detail into that. You can't do that with a marriage, you can't just say "That didn't work out." Next question? Because at one point you all loved each other to a point where you felt like you had to put more into your relationship. You felt you needed to let a lot of more people into your relationship. I mean, I don't knock people for getting married. If that's what you choose to do, so be it – you'll never hear me say "you are a fool" or any of that. If it comes from the heart; if this is some that you really want to do, do it. (33)

**SC** But it is not a key in whether you are a responsible father or not.

**DB** It is not a key.

marriage, and describes marriage as something you do when you want "to put something else into the relationship." Within this view, marriage is not a prerequisite for parenthood, and can become a hindrance when separating. Marriage is important when the relationship is going to that extra level. This points to research showing that it is not that marriage is not valued (as many of President Bush's marriage initiatives seemed to suggest) but that it is valued independently of parenthood. Marriage is about the relationship. Parenthood is different. Marriage carries a higher esteem in a way, and because of that you only commit to it when you really know, when "it comes from the heart."

## Appendix C: Reflexive Reading of Hunter's interview

**SC:** What is your understanding of responsible fatherhood to you as a black father? - sort of a strange question... (1)(2)

**Hunter:** It is not a strange because like I said, what it is with us young black men, we are all not taught responsibility. As far as being responsible for somebody else - that is something we have to grow into; you know as young men becoming men it is a hard to make that transition especially when you are used to running amuck. You know when you start having kids you feel like you should still be able to run amuck, and not share time with your kids. You know if you financially supply for your kids you feel that is your obligation, which it is not. You know, that is where a lot of young men is missing the point.

**SC:** So for you responsibility is not financial.

**Hunter:** financial it is not... it's more like spending quality time to a kid. I mean financially is part of the necessity of raising kids, raising a family, but quality time is the most important thing, you know what I mean. you know you spend with a kid. teaching them the values the things you want them to have and do in the right way. you know

**SC:** so, umm, and you think young black fathers think of that responsibility mainly just providing money wise.

**Hunter:** Just providing yes, they don't know the essential of spending quality time with your kid, you know, going to the barber shop with your kid, going to the park, you know going out making a family

(1) I had tried to meet with Hunter a number of times, but he had always changed plans at the last second. Whether it was a car he had to pick up for a family member, or somewhere else he had to be, finding a time to meet with Hunter became somewhat of a struggle. I finally agreed to meet with him at his house while he worked on a car. The set-up was less than ideal. Cars and buses were driving at high speeds every few seconds just a few feet away from us and Hunter was working while speaking. The result was not as bad as it could have been (the recorder captured the interview relatively well, and we did manage to touch on a lot of topics) but it ended up being the shortest interview of all at a little less than an hour.

2) I still cringe when I read myself saying "sort of a strange question..." This was my third interview, I knew Hunter from group quite well but I was still struggling with asking the first question. In the back of my mind I was still wondering if it was a good question. Of course, in this case it didn't matter a bit. Hunter grabbed it and ran with it, taking race by the horns without giving it a second thought.

dinner you know, you and your kids, like me, you know. My first experience taking my daughter to the beauty salon, you know was an experiment to me to go through what she had to go through and she was well pleased, you know what I mean, looking forward to now it's like not a big hassle that she has to go to the beauty salon. With my son, you know, his first hair cut, now it's you know, it's the fads, dad, can I get my hair cut this way, and this, that, and there, and it's like, oh no, you are too young, but you know, he's sees other images and he want to portrayl, but I am like, no this is not you yet. Yeah, you know, because he's too young, so you have to like know what is good for your child because eveybody is walking with the sag, little kids want to imitate the sag. That's not it. you know what I mean. So if you teach your kid, you know, as they come up to be a young lady, a young man, the right way and not want to be thuggish, you know what I mean? Cause if you let it go on it's get out of control and it's hard to put that reign on it. (3)

**SC:** So it is, umm, it is not merely being present, being there everyday, it is also teaching them.

**Hunter:** Teaching them, yes.

**SC:** Teaching them, from the beginning what is right, what is wrong, according to you and your experience.

**Hunter:** Yeah, yeah, my experience, or you know, or in general, you know, what society expect out of you as a child. Raising up to an adult; because if you teach your child the wrong way of becoming an adult, this is what they expect. YOur know, like, a lot of young men grew up maybe in single households where their moms was always abused you know they feel that as

3) I appreciated so much Hunter's examples of engagement with his own children. Hunter was single father, and I knew how involved he was with his children and how proud he was of them. I had talked with him many times outside of group about his son, a big, big kid (Over 200 pounds at 9 years of age) that loved to play football and was really active despite his weight. I knew the health concerns he had about him, the efforts to make him lose weight and the pride with which he spoke of him. I knew also of his daughter, the challenges that having a daughter posed for him as a man with relatively little knowledge of girls' needs. When he spoke of bringing his daughter to the beauty shop and his son to the barber shop, I could actually picture it...

4) Although I appreciated the fact that Hunter brought domestic violence as a problem, and that he clearly had a desire to make sure his children did not fall into abusive relationships, I remember also cringing in the back of my mind at the association of single motherhood with abuse. It is, of course, a problem of language... Single mothers do get abused,

they grow up that's their line to abuse women because nobody's not been near it and vice a versa, know what I mean. Like I tell my a daughter, life's going go up, you don't have to depend on some man to take care of you, you know what I mean. You can do this for yourself, and vice a versa, I try to teach my son to respect women, know what I mean, and not abuse them because I don't go around trying to abuse nobody, know what I mean. (4)

**SC:** How did you come to those understandings, to the idea that, how did you learn that because you are speaking about the fact that most young black fathers think of fatherhood just as providing, umm, and you are making an argument for being present, for being there everyday, for teaching your kids, for going with them to places, to barber shops, with your daughter to the beauty salon, to all these different things, how did you learn that?

**Hunter:** Well, I got a chance, I got a second chance. Like I said, I was there for my older kids, but I wasn't there. I forgot it, you know, I did, but I didn't spend a quality set of time, with my older set of kids. With my younger kids, I had a chance because like here it is, you know, I got strapped with some young kids from day one you know, coming out of the hospital, taking care of them. Somebody had to be responsible for making sure they survive in life. And, you know, like I didn't know the first thing about what it was to become a responsible father, young black man, taking care of kids. You know, I struggled everyday, trying to take care of myself. You know, what clothes to put on, you know what I mean, everyday, getting in the bath, know what I mean, everyday, you know, school wise, know what I mean, you know, what I had to do to get them in school, getting involved in the school

like married ones, but not because they are single, but because there are men that are abusive. The implication that if they were not single they would not be abused is false, but it also contradicts the message to his daughter (you do not have to depend on a man), as what it says is that ultimately you do (through marriage) if you don't want to get abused.

(5) The story of Hunter's struggle to be a responsible father is very moving. Here is a man that hadn't done a very good job taking care of himself or of his children before he had his twins. He had been an addict, incarcerated, and had his family turn their backs on him, and yet he managed to get himself together for his twins. His statements referring to how he struggled everyday got to me. I could not imagine raising my two sons without my wife, and I have more experience taking care of school issues, clothes, etc. than he probably did at the time...

thing, you know, that, that, came as a learning experience to me this is why, like I said, you know, young men are missing out on the most valuable thing of raising their kids, is quality time with them. (5)

**SC:** Umm, how long ago, you said you got a second change, obviously, with the first ones.

**Hunter:** Well, the big gap was in between my oldest kids and my youngest, I mean, like I said, I spent, my son's we did things, know what I mean, but it wasn't like what I am doing with my latter set of kids, know what I mean. We went out, we hung out, know what I mean, we did occassionally things, know what I mean, I tried to provide for umm, but like I said, I was caught up in a different life. You know, you know, when you are addict, you know what I mean, all you can see certain things, know what I mean, and as you start becoming responsible, leaving other things that was pulling you down, and pulling your kids away from you, you know, you know, you get that second chance around. You know, I got drug free, I've been drug free for over 20 years, so that gave me a clearer mind of responsibility, know what I mean, when I learned to learn how to stop using something that wasn't no good for me, you know, and caring about myself, more you know that I when I got a set of kids again, I learned them to have more respect for theirsself.

**SC:** How, what were you addicted to?

**Hunter:** I was, uh, cocaine, dope, you know, drinking, marijuana, I used all of the above, know what I mean, and, like I said, you know, you took institutional, to give me another chance, you know, around life, know what I mean. You know, I closed a lot of bridges when I was active

(6) Despite the fact that I had spoken with Hunter many times before this interview, his history with drugs had never come up. So when he began speaking about his addiction I was caught somewhat off guard. I realize now I was (and still am) amazed that he was able to quit. At the

using, not seeing my kids, you know, the mamas didn't really want you around, looking or acting the way you were. Umm, my family, kind of, you know, shunned me away from me. you know what I mean, but once I turned my life over, you know, I have had opportunities that normal people beg to have. I have people give me keys to their house now; lady right now, as you can see, I have her car. (6)

**SC:** Those first kids are all from the same mother?

**Hunter:** All together I have three different mothers.

**SC:** Three different mothers.

**Hunter:** Yes.

**SC:** So they were from two different mothers at the time.

**Hunter:** Yeah.

**SC:** And, from your own experience, you mentioned, drugs getting in the way of you being able to be a responsible father in a way,

**Hunter:** Yeah, it kept me being you know, immature, childish, and not knowing what responsibility was. I mean, I work, get money, you know, instead of going home to make sure my kids needed something or they go out; as soon as I got paid, I seen the drug guy right over here. So, by the time I get home, I really don't have no money, like, well, why you go to work? At the next day, I am going back to work borrowing money off somebody because I used all my up the night before you know, on something that was no good for me. What did it get me, but a lot more misery than what I had started out with, you know. And

struggle it must have represented with limited economic resources, a family that had shunned him and having been incarcerated. Now he is a good, involved and proud father who attends PTA meetings, is involved in policy council, is a role model to many kids in the neighborhood and does not miss a single fatherhood group...

as the saying go, misery loves company, you know, so if you provide you know to that type of lifestyle, all it is is just misery adding to misery.

**SC:** Do you think that is one of the main impediments of young black fathers, one of the main things that gets in the way, that is drugs, or is that specific to you?

**Hunter:** No, no, that is a specific to me. That is some inability to a lot of young men, a lot of them were born into, you know, being addicted from birth. Which they don't know, cause their mother, what the mother does, that is the fetal, that is what they do. Know what I mean, like I said, you know you seen babies withdrawn, withdrawal symptoms, you know, and they go through life having ups and downs, you know, and that cause a lot of it. But no, that's not what we can say, is it. What it is a lot of guys have never been fathered to, so how can they be a father too. You know, they don't know what the responsibility is to be you know, a caring person, when a lot of times they come from a broken home, and they have to think for themselves, so they keeping going through life fending for themselves but not for somebody else. I got mine's, you get yours, you know, they got that attitude you know what I mean. (7)

**SC:** So a lot of it, one of the things that gets in the way, is precisely the fact that they don't come from a family where they have a responsible father, so later on how can they be a responsible father.

**Hunter:** Right.

**SC:** If they never learned that from their own father?

**Hunter:** Right.

7) I was and still am somewhat surprised by his answer here. Hunter rejects the idea that drugs play a role as an impediment to responsible fatherhood practices within black communities. He states it is specific to him... Even more strangely, he blames drug-addicted mothers in those cases in which drugs are an issue. It is a random comment that indirectly blames, again, the behavior of mothers.



**SC:** Ummm, was that the case with you?

**Hunter:** I, matter of fact, I come from a family, I had a mother and a father, they seperated as I got older, but I stayed in contact with my dad, I stayed in contact with my mother, know what I mean, but it was like my mother, really like, raising, five kids, you know, there was nine of us all together, but my older brothers and sisters, you know way up in age, responsible, young, out on their own, but it was just the latter five of us that was at home, that my mother had to struggle with you know, so basically, I stayed in contact with my dad, but like I said, we had the community to help raise us. So if you go down the street, and you doing something you had no business doing, you got chastised from down the street, all the way back up til you go to your house. You know, and like I said, I was lucky, always, you know, you can say loved or gifted, but as a little child, I would go around doing bad things - vandalism guys cards and what not. A guy caught me by the seat of my pants, and told me like, you gonna start fixing everything you tore up. This was a guy that cared, taught me responsibility, like, hey why going around tearing up something that don't belong to you. So, you know, he showed me how to be a mechanic, you know, like I said, I had trades, I went to school for other things you know, but this is one of my passions. So if I care for a car, why can't I care for a person. Show that same enthusiasm about somebody else, especially mines. (8), (9)

**SC:** In a way you are also pointing to the fact that you don't have to be biologically the father of a child, to be able to sort of, transmit that sense of reponsibility to take, be a role model to...

**Hunter:** to be a role model, that is the lack

8) This is one of the only times in which Hunter mentions his mother as an important person in his upbringing, and even here it seems like a side story. The way Hunter tells his story, she was left to raise five children on her own. The community helped, but all I could think of when he told the story and when I read it now is "this poor woman!" Again, as a father, my heart is with fathers, but stories such as this one –and my feminist ideals– make me think, aren't we being terribly unfair to mothers? Even I have focused so much on the role my stepfather played raising me, yet the best example of a responsible parent in my own life is my mother...

9) The story of Hunter being forced to fix the cars he had broken by a man in the neighborhood is a remarkable story. Who was this man? Here I was interviewing Hunter decades after, and Hunter is still fixing cars for a living, all due to this one moment. It is a testament to what caring can do, and to the effect a single inspiring role model can have on an individual...

10) In reading all the interviews it has



of what young men are, you know, not trying to be a responsible role model to the youths that are coming up. You know these babies, only idolize what they see, if you set that trend for them, this is the trend that they go by. If you want to run around calling you mother, women, you know, bitches all day long, this is what they feel that they need to do. Instead of showing them what really is responsible, you know what I mean, if you take a broader picture, there are a lot of good guys, out there, that do have respect, or getting reared even the right way by mothers. But it's kinda hard when you don't have a strong male to help you do the other things you need to do, you know, through out life.

**SC:** So for you there's a difference between what a father does and what a mother does. There's a difference between them, or can they do the same thing? Or do you need a father?

**Hunter:** There's a total difference. You need a male to teach a male how to become a man, know what I mean, cause a mother can't teach a man to become a man. He have to go by example, so he have to see what he has to walk behind. You know, he can't walk behind a woman to become a man, you know, and vice a versa, you know, a young lady can't walk behind a man to become a woman. (11)

**SC:** So would a father be necessary to raise a daughter?

**Hunter:** To a certain point. Like I said, there's things, that we never went through that how can we tell a young lady that it's going to be ok. Especially when it comes time to you know, making that transition from a little girl to womanhood or lady, you know, the transformation like you know, their period-cycles, how can we tell

been tough at times for me to draw a line between what is discriminatory towards women and what isn't... Here, for example, Hunter attacks those that disrespect mothers by calling them "bitches" and then praises mothers that raise children the right way, saying that there is a lot of them, but seconds later he states it is hard to do so without a "strong man." How about just saying without help?

11) Hunter makes the argument here that you need a father to teach a man how to be a man, and a mother to teach a woman. When you cross them, then fathers are needed to teach women how they need to be treated, and mothers to teach men how to treat women. In my mind, this is the perfect example of Gramscian "common sense," not "good sense."

a young lady that she is going to be alright, when we never went through it. What do you have to do, you know what I mean. You know, there's like certain things, that guys can not actually teach a woman, but you can teach a woman how to respect herself, you can teach a woman how not to let noboby call you out your name, because, you know, I am not that type of person. But young ladies go that way, because they see what other men do, that's accepted, if you call them out their name, they feel that's norm. I tell my child, no, that's not the norm. Because that's not your name.

**SC:** So there is a role, that you play that is specific to you, and that your wife, girlfriend, your daughter's mother can not play?

**Hunter:** Can not play. No. Even to my girlfriend, she can't play. You know what I mean, there's certain things, know what I mean, that's daddy's little girl, you created this monster, yes. But, like there's certain things that I can not do, especially when it comes down to taking her to the store to buy you know certain garments. I can't do it. Because, you know, we don't what true size is you know, so I have to depend on somebody else, or a female to you know like, address certain needs. That motherhood have to be for men and women, but there's always that fatherhood thing too. So there's two different roles and you know they can't never come together because we very different. (12)

**SC:** So the role of the father is more important with boys, you think, than it is with girls?

**Hunter:** No, I feel it is important with both.

12) The example given here, that a mother is needed to help buy daughters their clothes made me smile... Couldn't a father learn that too? Sure, it is easier if you have had the experience yourself, but don't mothers learn everything about boys so as to buy them clothes? I understand the argument that having both a mother and a father (provided they are both good responsible parents) makes navigating a world divided along gender lines possibly easier, but not because of essential differences between genders, but because of how the world is constructed.

**SC:** With both.

**Hunter:** Yes, you know, because, if your responsible type guy or man, in general, you want the best, for your young lady, and you definitely want the best for your son. You have to teach your son not to disrespect women, vice a versa, you got to teach your daughter not to let a man disrespect you. You know, so yes, we play both roles, but we can't do it to their fullest degree.

**SC:** Ummm, you are not married? Were you ever married?

**Hunter:** Nah, I'm single.

**SC:** What do you, so what is, is marriage do you think important in being able to be a responsible father or not?

**Hunter:** Uhhh, that's an iffy question, know what I mean, like, I've been in long time relationships. And, I've, like I said, made commitments, couple, numerous times, about getting married, but it never panned out. Know what I mean, certain other things come up, know what I mean, you know, fidelity, on both sides. I was one time, she was one time, know what I mean, but no, I believe, you know that we are created to have an equal partner but I haven't found one that I, I'm compatible with, know what I mean. I'm, infatuated with the relationship I have now, but you know, when it comes across my heart or her heart, yes it could happen. I'm looking forward to being married; to making a better unity for my kids. You see, like, you know, you don't have to grow up being single to be happy. (13)

**SC:** You cohabitate now, so you live with your girlfriend, right? Or no...

13) Re-reading Hunters comments on marriage provides evidence to the idea that marriage is a sign that one has "arrived." It is not the first step towards stability, but the last one. Seeing the other way around (marriage as the institution that creates responsible human beings) confuses correlation with causality. Marriage is what a couple does when things are going well, you have economic stability, acquisition power, are in a good place as a couple, etc. One doesn't get married so that all those other things work out. Yet president Bush created all these programs to emphasize marriage, as if the problem was that people did not value marriage. The problem was always that people were not doing well enough to get married.

**Hunter:** No. We live in different places.

**SC:** Oh, in different places. Ok, ummm, would that change if you got married? Yes, probably...

**Hunter:** Yes, it would definitely change; we would live together, you know. Yes, know what I mean.

**SC:** Ummm, but you don't see, or you think marriage would provide a more stability to the relationship for your kids, is that right?

**Hunter:** I believe it would give them more sense of security. Give them, not me, cause I feel that like their alright, but I don't know, from the child's perspective.

**SC:** If they are or not...

**Hunter:** If they are or not, know what I mean. You know, they going through life, running around all their other peers. Like my kids used to have that, you know like, when they were coming up as little kids, going to school, you know, kids' moms was always there, you know, and it's never them, it's always dad was there for them. So, you know, life plays havoc on them, kids say harsh things, where's your mother at, know what I mean. But, to have somebody, that really care about my kids, at another stage in their life, it's a plus too. I mean, you know, she's like a surrogate mother to em, know what I mean, she looks out for their best welfare, takes, spends quality time with them. You know, when she goes out with her daughter, they go out, we sit down, have family meals together,  
(14)

**SC:** Ok, so you have step children together, kind of?

14) The idea that children of single fathers get bullied for not having a mother at school events, etc. was a common theme across a few of the interviews. Yet kids do not get bullied as much for not having fathers, perhaps because the expectation is that fathers leave, or because fathers are rarely present at school events with children? I wonder if it is also the fact that being abandoned by a mother carries so much more significance socially for children... "If your mother didn't like you enough to stay, then who would?"

**Hunter:** Yeah, so we do family things together, like I said, we go out, we do vacations together, you know, plan trips, go to movies, we have movie nights at home.

**SC:** Ummm, do you think marriage, in terms of black fathers, in general, is important, yes, no?

**Hunter:** Culturally, yes, it's important. 'Cause that's the way you know my grand parents were married over 60 years. You know, my mother and father, even though they separated, they stayed together till they separated, until my father died, know what I mean, they stayed together. My Aunts and Uncles, they all stayed together, you know, so yes, I believe it's important, you know, for a strong unity of family, you know, for responsibility, yes, to be married.(15)

**SC:** Ok, your girlfriend, is not the mother, is the mother of your daughter, but also of your son, or no?

**Hunter:** No, no, my girlfriend is not the mother of neither of them.

**SC:** Of neither one of them, ok. Ummm, where is the mother? Do you have custody?

**Hunter:** I've had custody since the day I brought them home from the hospital. I've been raising my kids from day one. The mother's been in and out the kid's life, they see her, know what I mean, like I said, that's another scripture, that's another page, because she's still caught up in life, you know, mishaps, know what I mean.

**SC:** So, it's fully on you?

**Hunter:** Yes, it's fully on me

**SC:** So, your raising both of them, I mean,

15) The argument for marriage is made here at the level of culture. Hunter's grandparents were married for 60 years. I don't think there is anybody in my family that has been married for that long. And I find there is something really, really, beautiful about being married for that long, about spending a lifetime together. Of course, the argument here again is: is it marriage what grants you the strength to stay together and be responsible, or is because you are a strong and responsible couple that you can stay married for 60 years?

with the help of your girlfriend.

**Hunter:** With the help of my family in general, my sisters, my nieces, you know, my brother, they all gave support, my mother until the day she passed away, was there supporting me, helping me raise my kids.

**SC:** So, it's like you said, it takes a little bit, it's a community thing - it takes a village.

**Hunter:** It takes a village to raise a child; if you don't have that or like I said, somebody doesn't want to lend a hand, if you see somebody's child out there doing something wrong, you need to say something, know what I mean. But today in society these young kids are just too well out of the way that you don't know what attitude that they have even trying to say something to one of them, you know. So, it's today's society, we're shunning away from trying to deal with kids or having kids be responsible for themselves. (16)

**SC:** You mentioned a few things that get in the way of black fathers being responsible. You mentioned the fact that they are raised, very often, without fathers, so, they themselves can't be responsible fathers too. What are some other things that you think get in the way?

**Hunter:** I, lack of, I guess, support, jobs, know what I mean, education, and then, like I said, a lot of them are being mislabeled by the division, know what I mean. I know it takes two people to make a child, but, you know, it's always the woman that has a child, and if she don't want to let the man be bothered with the child, then, like, he goes his own way. Then this child grows up; it's like a double edge sword, you know, even though their

16) Here is the first hint Hunter gives of the idea that because we are not allowed to discipline children anymore, that everything is called abuse, it becomes very difficult to raise children. Although he develops this argument further below, here he makes specifically in regards to social fatherhood. When I read this for the analysis, I was surprised... I had completely missed it during the interview and never even asked him to explore it further. Luckily he went back to it later on.

(17) This is the only moment in which Hunter points clearly at structural factors as bearing part of the blame for "irresponsible" fatherhood. Yet immediately after he seems to blame women again in a very peculiar sentence: "if she don't want to let the man be bothered with the child." Even as I read it now I have a hard time deciphering the turns and twists it takes, except I know, I sense it is constructed to let the man off

not together, you know, he might be with some other woman, and the girls mad, so she don't let the father to see the child. He gets the attitude, so what, ok, forget it. (17)

**SC:** So, there's a sense, when you talk about division, your not talking about family division...

**Hunter:** No, no, I'm talking about division in general, you know.

**Hunter:** Yeah, yeah,

**SC:** Between gender like, the man and the woman.

**Hunter:** Yeah, between a man and woman; especially, a lot of them young kids are having babies, so their indecisive, one minute their with this girl, the next minute they're with another girl, and this girls gets mad cause I got your baby, so your not going to see this baby no more, know what I mean. And, you know, some guys just keep on stepping. Some guys might go that extra mile and want to see their kid, or make the aggregation fight, you know, about their child. But some will just leave. Somebody else is raising their kid, or trying to you know, misleading their kids. I am not saying raising, I say misleading. (18)

**SC:** So, I got that there's a sense of which, for you, the woman plays a particular role, in which if she decides to, if the relationship's not stable, she could punish the father by taking the child, or by not allowing, or not encouraging...

**Hunter:** No allowing em, not encouraging them, know what I mean, like I said, especially, like I said, young black men, are you know, their still at home, you know what I mean, and some of the young ladies

the hook. The man doesn't want to be bothered, but it is the woman's fault because she doesn't let him be bothered (?)

(18) Hunter takes a much softer position on gender here, and brings more complexity and less clear pointing of fingers. Perhaps he approaches the situation like this because he formulates it in terms of "kids," not adults, so gender becomes less of an issue. His use of the word misleading also threw me off... I took it to mean a man pretends to want to raise the kids just to be with the mother, although in reality he has no interest in the kids. His explanation a minute later (see below) confirmed this...

19) The image being played with here is that of the mother as the gatekeeper, who not simply allows (or not) a father to see his children, but "encourages" them. And if she doesn't, then the child is victimized.



their at home, or maybe they go out, they have babies to get their own little place, but the father's not really coming with them, or sometimes he does, but, like I said, mishaps happen, they have falling outs, the guy have to go back with his mother... you know, girl moves on, with the baby, you know what I mean? So there comes that point... do you let this guy come around to see the kid? If you don't then like I said this child is one that has been victimized. (19)

**SC:** And that would be raised...growing up without a...

**Hunter:** Without a father... With somebody else trying to be the father. And nine times out of ten they are like, you know "I'm just here for her...I'm not really here for the package that comes with it, you know, cause I got my own little kids over here somewhere, you know."

**SC:** You think it is tougher for somebody to fulfill the role of a father that is not the biological father. Like for somebody to be a stepfather, it makes it tougher?

**Hunter:** Yes and no. You have some guys that really care, you know what I mean? You know...like "I am into this young lady and I got to be into her kids" You know what I mean. But a lot of guys don't go in looking at it like that... You know. She has a liability too...If you take her you take on her liability too. But like I said, men are being raised to see one thing and not looking at everything around it, you know. They see a nice car and they say "I got to have that car," they don't care what the price is or what is wrong with the car. It just looks nice. They see the car and they have to have it. Forget everything else that goes with it.

**SC:** Like you said before, the latest fad, the

Who victimizes the child? Not the father that is absent, but the mother who doesn't "encourage" him to be a father. Again here the language hints at patriarchy even if, overall, the story itself presents a relatively complex picture of a relationship with blame dished out on everyone...



latest thing...like your son wanting this haircut or that haircut?

**Hunter:** Yeah

**SC:** You've pointed at some of the things that get in the way like, being raised without a father, the instability early on in the relationship, that they may be with other people, that they may move on with the child and not allow for the father to keep on coming along. What are some things that -and you mentioned also jobs, education and those things...- what are some things that make it easier for fathers to raise their children?

**Hunter:** What makes it easier? I mean...some guys if they are raised up in a responsible way, being cared to, maybe they show the compassion, the caring for something that they have. Some guys, like a lot of the guys are excited, especially about their first born, especially if it's a male, you know..." this is my son" They are infatuated because it is something new in the beginning, you know what I mean? But like I said, you know, the lack of what goes with that responsibility do not assure it...You know, they do not know exactly...They get into the feeding, the holding, the changing, but they don't know what all comes with it every month. Because what you dictate to that child or the things that you do around a child. Sometimes you get mad around the child, or sometimes you mishandle the child, especially at an early age, and they are so fragile. You know... So, Like I've said, there some good points men do, but they are not being educated to what they are doing. So we need to have classes like women do have classes on being a responsible mother, we need to start holding and housing classes to teach young men how to become men. Not only because

20) I remember counseling an adolescent once who wanted to have a baby and would continuously fantasize about buying him cool clothes and getting him dressed, going to the park with him and his friends, etc. It was a child's fantasy, but at 16, also a dangerous one. Hunter's idea of an "infatuation" with something new reminds me of that. I agree with the core of his message. How what seemed exciting at the beginning turns into a catastrophe at 4 in the morning, when the baby has been crying for three hours because of an upset stomach and the young father doesn't know what to do...

it is financial. It is like spending quality time. A lot of them just don't know that. They don't know to go out with'em to the ball game, hang out with your buddies... so take your child with you when you are hanging out with your buddies. In a positive way, you know, not in that out of the way, wrong way. Spend quality time. We need to start showing up to some of the football games with our kids, you know, go out there for football practice, because today in society you look at all those kids that play pee-wee football and the majority of the mothers are there, you know, so we need to get more active in supporting us, we black men, teaching young guys...if you see a guy out there complement him when he is out there with his child so he don't feel so (inaudible) about what he is doing. It's alright you know? To be out there with your son, to be involved. Give him a good pat on the back, go out of your way, you know, "I like what you are doing," you know "keep it up" (20) (21)

**SC:** Is that what you do with your son?

**Hunter:** Oh yeah...I go out to games... The little guys see me, they know "Hey, that is Hunter Jr.'s dad" you know, they know who I am. Even when I come into places "That is Hunter Jr.'s dad." So, you know, it's not like they don't know who I am. They know who I am because I am involved with my kid. You go down the street and you don't know whose child that is. We go down the street and believe me, they can tell you...they know who we are.

**SC:** I know a lot of the things we have talked about have been tied to race, but I was wondering if you thought race plays a direct role in responsible fatherhood. (22)

**Hunter:** It doesn't. It doesn't. It's like...you know, the majority of white and Indians

21) Hunter states that fathers need to be supportive of each other. Let other men know that showing up in support of children is good. Hunter provides the example of a football game, which makes sense, but to me it seems it is even more important to show-up for things like parent-teacher meetings, graduations, doctor's appointments, etc. Men are expected to show-up at football, but maybe not at a doctor's appointment, or at a parent teacher meeting. Those seem to me more important because they break through what is expected.

22) There is a couple of interviews where I got caught in the story, in the details and suddenly found myself in a silence without knowing where else to take the interview. This was one of those moments. I had been thinking of Hunters statement that everyone knows who he is

and stuff they always have been family oriented. It's been passed down. This is what dad's do because my dad's been there. Take my son by the hand and go out on the field and spend that quality time together. Like I say...us black have not had that and we do not do that. There is a handful that do, spend that time as a little kid coming up every weekend, me and my kid, or every day there is something out the blue we going to do. You know... we have a ritual routine. A lot of young men don't have that. A lot of black men don't do that.

**SC:** So you are saying race doesn't play a factor in responsible fatherhood but you are also saying there is a difference in how people have been raised?

**Hunter:** It's just different. The black...like I said, we were couples. We were all raised that way. My grandparents and great grandparents were always together. Families, you know what I mean. So, we were raised up that way, we know what it is. But when we started getting that separate families and the majority of it is black. But now it is beginning to get both sided, it is not like...I'm just saying now you have a lot of white kids being raised by their grandmothers, by their mothers and their run amok. But when you have the unity of both parents or somebody that do care the child does better. So you can't say it's a difference between... It's just a caring for what you see. We have a lack of caring in the black community for what a child do or do not do compared to the rest of society (23)

**SC:** Why do you think is that lack?

**Hunter:** (long pause) It's kind of hard to say. I guess we as people started just giving up. And society took a lot out of us by tying our hands about if you was doing

in the neighborhood, and it was a pleasant image. Hunter is a likeable guy, someone I would probably enjoy as a neighbor, with a great sense of humor and an open and engaging personality. And then I realized there was silence and I did not have a question... So I went back to race, which he had already partly addressed before. It sounded terribly awkward, but Hunter didn't seem to have a problem with it. He just jumped on it and the conversation continued, but I knew in the back of my head that despite the fact that it had worked out, it had been forced and random...

23) Hunter's comment here (that there is a lack of care for what the community sees) made a lot of sense to me, and reminds me for some reason of Prilleltensky and his vision of community psychology... "How do we get the community involved?" I kept on thinking. And then I asked the question "Why?" and Hunter went in a completely unexpected direction having to do with disciplining children, and the fear that children may call CYF and what was discipline is now abuse... I was lost.

anything to a child, you are hurting a child it's child abuse. So, instead of...spoiling a...sparing a child is what society is doing, you are spoiling a child instead of sparing it. Because when the child does something wrong you can't chastise it, if you howl at it, you are abusing it, if you beat it, you are abusing it. So the average child is getting smart enough to say "Hey...child abuse," you know. And they call on you. So you have somebody else stepping in trying to raise your kid and they are not doing a great job at it. (23)

**SC:** When you say somebody else you are talking particularly about government and institutions.

**Hunter:** Society in general... That has made a difference between what has happened in black communities versus other communities in society even if it is beginning to happen in all communities. Every child will tell you "Yeah, I call," Because they don't want to do what you tell them to do. I tell my kids. You feel that somebody else is going to take care of you better than me, then you go stay with them. Because it's not going to get any easier on the other side. like I said, you have to be stern with our kids, and a lot of us are not stern anymore. I have to deal with the consequences of calling, like "you are going to tell me that I can't do this to my child, then you take care of it then" (24)

**SC:** So part of the difference with black communities from other communities for you is due to not being able to be stern with kids, to having an institution sort of bump in into how you behave as a father.

**Hunter:** It is a lot to do with it, and... we still have all those single mums raising kids, and like I said, they can't only go to a certain point in raising a man. Because a

24) The resentment over being told what to do as a parent is palpable here... It makes me wonder about difference. How it must feel to be told continuously how it is that you can and cannot be as a parent, the ways in which you are lacking, etc. And yet, the numbers on domestic violence and child abuse/neglect are not pretty. How do you balance respecting people's lives with the need to protect those who are most vulnerable?

young man at 11-12, start feeling your (inaudible). Especially if they are bigger than their mothers they are not going to go for what you are telling me. you are not going to put your hand on me because, physically, I can beat you. So they don't have nobody to tell them or let them know than something else is even harder than you out there. You are always going to run up against something that is going to be even nastier than you. But like I said young men are not raised that way, so they don't care. So how can you have respect for a woman when they have been seeing the wrong things in their own house.

**SC:** OK...so we have touched on almost everything, I believe. Is there anything that you think it is important that you haven't talked about in regards to responsibility, fatherhood, race...

**Hunter:** Well...Responsibility needs to be re-educated back into the school system. Set this classes aside. We need to have men come into some of these schools teaching these young men the same way they teach women...how they have these baby classes. Bring both of them in there and have them do their seminar. Have a study of maybe young kids being married and you have to do this and that here and see how it goes, you know what I mean. Or being separated but having a child, and hold your responsibility. Do a study on that there. So maybe as they are getting into adulthood they'll know these things so they can make a better decision as a young person that improves their chances in life a little better.

**SC:** So you are arguing for catching them early, in school through education...

**Hunter:** In education of being a responsible father. Because why not prepare early, you prepare for everything

else early.

**SC:** What made you take...You said you took your son and daughter from the hospital. What made you make that decision then? I mean, before you were doing drugs and...

**Hunter:** Well, I was clean by the time I took my kids. The mum was institutionalized so either you let society take the kids...because you can't raise them in a institution, or the other parent has to step up. And I did. And I don't regret it for a second... It was a second chance. To do something more positive in my life.

**SC:** Were you as convinced then when you did it?

**Hunter:** Ah...no I was asking myself, "did I make the right decision," you know...bringing back two kids home. I was there for my first son, I was there. I can tell you exactly the day, the time and the weight of my first son. I was there. Thirty five years ago. It was right after monday football game, 5:45 in the morning, he weighed 7,01... I made sure that was the time that had to be in his birth certificate. (25)

**SC:** But when you talk of a second chance, does that begin with Henry?

**Hunter:** With my twins. The second chance is with my twins. I was there with my other kids, I was in their life. I would go to the park with them...

**SC:** I forget they are twins

**Hunter:** Yeah. I would go and spend time with my other kids. but I was still caught in another fall. The second time around I am able to spend more quality time with my

25) I can still remember Hunter's face when he recited the exact time and date of the birth of his first son. His eyes became illuminated... he spoke with pride and joy, like it had been two days ago, not thirty-five years...

kids in a clearer sense not having to you know, hey, this drug is calling me, I'll see you later, I'll catch you next week when I catch you. Now it's like I am all devoted to.. If I say I am going to do something i am going to do it unless something urgent comes up. Then yes. We spend quality time. Like today, my son went to the ball game. My daughter said, I don't want to go. I didn't want to go because the pirates are spiraling down, but they won last time we went. We went to arena football together. We go to basketball games together. my son is looking forward to going to a Steelers game. I am an active man anyway with hood involvement. I am trying to see men stay involved with their kids lives at an early stage.

**SC:** So you are hoping that they have the...

**Hunter:** ...drive, the motivation to be responsible. That's why we need to start early, have classes in 10th, 11th grade, so maybe that might ease and slow down the destruction that our kids are going through.

## Appendix D: Reflexive Reading of Lamar's Interview

SC: I'm just gonna leave it on the floor, if that's all right...and I'm gonna put my phone to record too. I will use it as a backup just in case the batteries runs out on the middle of it... because it has happened.

L: Now, understand and that I go through history of the fathers, you know what I mean? You're talking to a founding father. I feel like George damn Washington. You know what I'm saying? Know that I'll be able to, you know, provide that history from day one, you know what I mean? (1)

SC: Yeah.

L: Through the years. Brother M. can provide a lot too...

SC: And I'm gonna talk with him next. Yeah, we tried to meet two times already and it's been one thing after another.

L: I hope it happens

SC: Yeah absolutely [Overlapping Conversation] So Yeah, I speak with M. Regularly... So it's an open conversation really, but it starts with a question of what is responsible fatherhood to you as a black father. So that's a strange question in a way, I realize. And we don't wanna go to a lot of places, obviously and... you know but it starts with that. So what is responsible fatherhood? When you think of responsible fatherhood what does it mean to you as a black father?

L: Are you ready now?

1. Lamar was ready to talk. His intensity at the beginning of our meeting was palpable. Sitting in a chair in the middle of his living room, with the walls covered in pictures and newspaper clippings, it was an imposing presence. I had the feeling Lamar wanted to give me the 101 class on the fatherhood movement in Pittsburgh. He had told me the prior week he wanted to make a documentary about his struggles as a father and the history of the movement. It was pretty clear from the beginning that he was concerned about his health and his legacy, and that came through in the interview.



SC: Yeah.

L: Oh, okay. Well to me being a responsible father is a person that can give time to his children. Being able to educate, I mean usually people think of being responsible as financial but I think it's more so that being a responsible father to me is being able to deliver time to your children and being able to positively make sure they grow correctly and being able to keep to and do some of their needs that they have financially but being responsible to me is...

SC: Time spent with them.

L: Time spent for them because when you're spending time you're teaching so...

SC: So spending time with them is teaching them and you're saying the provider role is there but that's not what is important. Responsible fatherhood is not... You said there is a little... There is a financial thing there but it's not being provider, it is spending time with them and teaching them.

L: Spending time with them. They have to learn how to roar. They got to learn how to walk. A young lady has to learn... And finances doesn't teach that. How do you show a man, a young boy how to become a man or how to walk as one. It's not with money. How do you show that young lady that she's supposed to, you know, look at a man that's much like her dad or the person- that significant other person that is in her life as a man. You know what I mean? That's not financial. You know what I mean? So all the critical needs and what they need through education does not fully depend on schooling but your teaching. It's about giving back. It's about showing. You

become a teacher once you become a parent. There's no way that, you know, so... when you're responsible, you are willing to teach and try to give your values, your way, your perspective.

SC: You mentioned there being a role model so part of that teaching is also being a role model.

L: Yes. Yes. Yes. it has to, you know what I mean? Mufasa had to teach Simba how to roar and how to hold his head up. He couldn't have taught him that, you know what I mean, not being there. A lot of being responsible is just having a good attendance, being there. You know what I mean? If you ask a child at a younger age, what do they want, they want financial or they want the person's time. They're gonna pick that time because they are learning. They're still little computers, so if you put in positivity to them and you're showing them how to do the necessary things and what's correct and what's not correct, that's more important in the long run than this money stuff because you're growing an adult. You're nurturing him, planting the seed of positive growth. You know what I mean? It makes a positive child. In order to do that, you have to be there and be responsible is being there. Whether it's negative or positive you're there. You see what I'm saying? And it builds whatever attitude that that child has, comes from that, either you not being there or you being there. Either you're there and you're positive or you're there and you're negative. It's growing that child but you're there. You know what I mean? So you can't equate ... It's just time, because that question it is like a double-edge sword if you really look at it. You know what I mean? And you wanna be able to walk the walk and talk the talk so the time of being able to, and with time you're on the

2. Lamar uses, like another two of the fathers interviewed, the metaphor of animals in the wild –particularly the lion– to speak of maleness and fatherhood. The lion is a fascinating symbol, but an unfortunate one to use in the context of responsible fatherhood. It used as a symbol both of strength and as the “king” of the jungle –the king of the family, metaphorically. It is also a perfect metaphor because of the Disney movie The Lion King and its numerous father themes. But –and this I am sure they are unaware of– it is also one of the only mammals that has been observed regularly committing the animal equivalent of infanticide, murdering its young with absolute brutality and capriciousness. I am quite sure that image is not part of this metaphor, but it speaks, at least for me, to the violence inherent to patriarchy. We do not need to be lions, we just need to be decent fathers. And there is a lot of that message within Lamar’s narrative, even if once in a while it gets mixed up with traditional patriarchal motifs.

positive, now is the best thing that you can do.

SC: How did you come to that understanding?

L: I came to that understanding when I became a single parent because when I was... Listen, I did a lot of wrong things because I was raised in that... I was raised in that like where the mettle was controlling things and we didn't have the house clean and you sitting at the house, I had a problem with it! You know what I mean? So my daughter, the birth of my daughter put me all on a whole different... I was reborn. I went through a metamorphosis because everything I believed wasn't true. You understand what I'm saying? I gave a couple of females hell about me working and I come home and the house ain't clean? We had a problem! You know what I mean? So my values was different. (3)

SC: This was before your daughter was born.

L: Before my daughter...now, I had other children but they had their mother. You understand what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah

L: She's the baby. N's the baby, so I became a man in 1991. The rest of the time I thought I was and I wasn't. So that's where everything clicked in, in 1991. When I had this small child that I had to be totally responsible for all her needs, then I learned being at home is the hardest job in the world. I called those ladies, the two females that I had babies by and apologized to them because I did not know. We have a beautiful relationship. You see what I'm saying? But I called

3. Out of all the interviews conducted, this was, without a doubt the most emotionally intense. The narrative of how the birth of Lamar's daughter changed his life was particularly poignant. The birth of Spencer did not produce such a drastic change in my life, but it did transform the way I looked at life, so I felt I could understand...

(4.) "I became a man in 1991. The rest of the time I thought I was and I wasn't." What a great quote... I could see Lamar before his daughter's birth, probably not a particularly nice individual, possibly – it sounds like from what he says- verbally abusive (perhaps worse) being suddenly made aware of how the other side lived through his daughter. Yes, he still uses "females" and "ladies" to refer

them and told them “Wow I'm very sorry.” You know what I'm mean? “I was an asshole all this time.” You know what I mean? “I humbly apologize to you.” Being at home, you need to get paid for. Because when you're at home, you're the psychologist, the psychiatrist, you're the cook, you're the maid. You're the person breaking up stuff. You know what I mean? Fights with the kids or... You know what I mean? It's so much that you're doing all in one at home! I didn't know that because I was always at work. You see what I'm saying? And there was a standard “I'm making the money. Things need to be in order because I always was a good provider.” You know what I mean? (4)

SC: You were a provider before but you weren't there.

L: Right.

SC: It's happened in time. So that's how you learned.

L: Right, exactly. I thank her for making me a man. And I say it when I'm at speakings or things, I'd tell them. Tell them exactly when I became a man. I was not always a man. You know what I'm saying? “Well what do you mean Mr. D.? “I became a man in 1991?”” When I had to be totally responsible for...

(Phone rings, interview gets interrupted briefly)

SC: And that was the question. Make sure this is going in. And you answer, with the birth of your daughter and then where was the mom? How... Like why was it different that time than the times before?

L: Well see when she was born, she was

to women, but you can sense in his words the deep transformation he went through. “I humbly apologize to you.” I thought about how it must have felt to the women who shared a life with him for an extended period of time to hear those words and I was very moved. Moments such as the one he describes here are what life is all about... deep learning moments that shake one's most taken for granted beliefs.

premature. You can put her in your hand. She was 1 pound 3 ounces so I was leaving my job at the Civic Arena making hockey ice and setting up concert stages and different things like that. I was leaving my job, going to the hospital, putting my hand in an incubator, willing her to live. The mom never bothered with her. Then I was in the drug game a little bit, you know what I mean? I was making money at the time and she wanted me... She... When this baby... See the Lord sent me this baby and I knew that I was gonna be totally responsible for her. It was just a feeling that I had, you know what I mean? Going to the... Rubbing her in the incubator and whatnot so that is when I made a conscious decision... Well no, the last thing I did when I bought this house and took my family to Disney world. You know what I mean and as we were driving down our driver, he was... We drove down. My brother who's a doctor. You know, he's one of my cancer doctors actually. Even though I had the money he was like "You know, you're really smart. You're always doing well. Why don't you quit this life? You need to quit this life." And driving down to Florida, I made them a promise when I came back to Pittsburgh Pennsylvania. The momma had N. at the time. She wasn't doing- doing like laboring in the house by herself this that and the other shit. (5)

SC: How old was T.?

L: T. was two months, you know what I mean? Two months, now mind you she stayed two months out of the hospital but when they let her out of the hospital she had... She was little you can just put her in your hand. She was so small. The car seat... Oh it was crazy. Now she's bigger you know what I mean? Tall... I mean beautiful, you know what I mean? Like

(5) What did it? Lamar had four kids before T., but it was the birth of his daughter that did it. And the fact that she was premature, that her mother did not want her, that she had nobody in the world but him. I have no doubt Lamar was ready to quit selling drugs and change his life around, but I also suspect that it would have never happened without her, because he had nothing he wanted to fight for, no meaning on the other side. With the birth of his daughter he was forced to care for somebody weaker than him, somebody that had nobody but him, somebody that might not have made it without him. That was the push. It reminded me an A. Hopins movie, "The Edge" where the only survivor of a catastrophe finds the strength to survive it through caring for others...

you would never know but the mom didn't wanna be a mom. She wanted me to stay in the game. She liked the money and the things that the game brought, you understand? The Lord had his hand on me and I was always thinking this is not what I wanna do anyway, you know what I mean? So it wasn't hard for me to...

SC: Quit.

L: Quit or jump out, you know what I mean? I just had to have a purpose. The purpose came in that little bundle, you see what I mean? So I made that promise and I stopped selling drugs.

SC: Now was it a promise to your brother you said?

L: To my family, my mom, my auntie, no because I took my family down.

SC: And they all knew that you were hustling?

L: Yeah because... No, you know, like I said, when they used to call me the crack head or they used to call me the help-pay-bills and stuff like that, I was all right but then, you know, your family always talk stuff on you unless they need something. You know what I mean? So then, once I had this baby and the Lord started changing my ways and what I needed to do knowing that I was going to be fully responsible for this child because the mother wasn't trying to be a mom. She didn't bond with the baby. So the baby was bonded with me. So, you know, I got rid of her.

SC: That hadn't happened before with your kids before?

L: No.

SC: The two other mothers? There was two before?

L: No, yes, yes.

SC: before like...

L: They were always there for the kids.

SC: Okay, so that's also the difference that the mother was not there for this.

L: Right.

SC: And it fell completely on your lap...

L: Right so it was just crazy but then again it has taken me back to me not having a father and I was like "This is not going to happen." You know what I mean? So it took me back to visualizing and when I was telling you earlier while standing there and waiting for my father to come through the door. This is not going to happen. You know what I mean? So she changed my life. So I was working. I had this child. I was getting... Pay stubs was... Pay checks were zeroes from down at the C A. I was working all the time but they were garnishing 100% of my income. I got tapes that we were on night talk talking about it and different things like that. How do you work and you receive nothing? You know what I mean? So I basically was working for free. Then the court said to get that settled because I took it to the media because usually in the Commonwealth States, the female can go down and get a hearing [SNAPS] legally split. You had to wait. I didn't have time to wait. I mean I had... The landlord didn't want to hear....(6)

SC: "They've taken all of my check."

(6) Lamar had told me a week before how when he was a child he expected his father to come to his graduation (unsure what grade) because he had attended his brother's, but he never did. The image of himself expecting for the door to open and for his father to walk in, and the ensuing disappointment when he didn't stayed with him. Lamar was beyond broken hearted by this. I cannot imagine what that must feel as a child, and I made a mental note as I was hearing him to remember... no matter what life throws at me, I will walk through when my kids are expecting me to...

L: Yeah, "Well I got you handing me zeroes?" Yeah, I make nothing... Brother I don't... They don't want to hear that. The grocery store don't want to hear "Oh well can I have this food to feed this baby?" They don't want to hear that. Do you see what I'm saying? So I start bettering myself. I started protesting. I started, back then, getting father things, trying to get father's things together. I had C. help me start and they told me to give my child to a female in order to receive benefits and I didn't think that I should have to do that. So I started crawling out to start and complaining about this atrocity that they're doing and said now the other things need to change blah blah blah blah blah and then we... I went to meet Mister W. who runs AW. He's been running AW forever. He started a father's program. I was second when... M. G. was the first one hired, I was the second one hired and we went out and we addressed these fathers. So, you know, through trying to be positive and getting walls thrown up, I mean, there's a lot of things that me and that baby changed. The hospital papers used to be biased. It used to say... You couldn't get service unless you filled out the paperwork but I never went through contractions or had any... You know what I mean? Had any of these female problems so you couldn't, you know, get seen. Well, I made sure she got seen but, you know what I mean, it was a hassle! Because the paperwork is asking me how long I've been in labor, how long I've dilated, how long... These are not questions that are purview to me. I don't need to be answering these questions so you know, through fighting with them and you know, going through different legal aspects and dealing with some of the... They changed the paperwork, you know what I mean? That's one thing I... That was the first thing that you know, the

(7) I had heard of this story through the newspaper. It was the first time I had heard about Lamar. The article highlighted the difficulty the system had in dealing with a single black father, how it simply was not ready for it, and so they kept on making mistakes that betrayed a gender bias against single fathers and possibly (although this was not discussed) a racial bias against black fathers. Lamar's ability to organize, protest, and use news outlets changed things somewhat, but the battle for him continued everywhere he went with his daughter: hospital, schools, etc.



coalition did. (7)

SC: I see...

L: People don't know that history. You know what I mean? They don't know... They probably just... They thought it all these stuff had changed. No I almost went to jail a couple of times. You know what I mean? Because I'm refusing and, I remember, I braided her hair, put beads in her hair. She was out here and my niece was out here watching her. I'm in the house. I'm cooking. She fell, right out here and had like one of them, you know, little hair cuts. You can't even see the cut and this thing was bleeding! I'm like "Oh my god I can't find where it is!" But it was bleeding. I drive her over here. She was four at the time. I drive her over to the hospital over here in Penn Avenue on Wilkinsburg. And that's when they had that paperwork. Now my child is in the emergency room and bleeding you know what I mean? Now mind you my daughter could talk. She can talk at nine months. You know what I mean? And I hear "You can't touch my cuckoo!" Oh (8)

SC: That was it...

L: That was it. I jumped up, ran in there and we had problem. "Her cut's on her hand why are you down there? You know what I mean? See now, their thing was if a man had a child, a female they... "You-You try to check my baby for some goofy stuff?" Oh man, do you know what I mean? That was discriminatory. You see what I'm saying? So, the fights that I got in to, they pick with me and they piss me off and I would, you know, react to the fact of what you're doing here. I told the doctor, "If you touch my child, you in particular, if you touch my child, we're going to have problems." Well "If you

(8) To hear this big, strong, loud black man say "cuckoo" was almost dissonant and highlighted the changes that his daughter brought to his life. His story also pointed to the difficulty inherent to being a single father with a daughter, having to deal with all the idiosyncrasies that raising a child of the opposite gender brings, particularly if you have never had to raise another child. For me, it further highlighted the monumental task he took on, particularly considering where he started (having never raised a child, being a hustler, raising her by himself, etc.).

touch my child son, we're going to have problems. Now we're not going... I'm not going to play. You better get another doctor down here because I don't want you touching my child." Now she had already said don't touch her cuckoo, you know what I mean? You ain't touching her. You don't even need to be touching her down in there any way. Where's the Head Administrator here? The cut's on her head. Why are you messing around down there? Or trying to? You know what I mean? What's going on here?" So I, you know, oh I pissed him. I pitched it. They transferred us to a children's hospital, Presbyterian Children's Hospital, the children's hospital for them to deal with us because my insurance dealt with these people here. They got... No we're not going to have this problem. You know what I mean? So that's just freshly new in this... And they started seeing. Then you know, it's just hard. I mean it was hard, really hard trying to raise the opposite sex. You know what I mean? Then I developed the "open door" policy which I teach to my fathers and is 100% effective. It has never failed.

SC: What is the open door policy?

L: It's like... It's the... The significant other and I teach it to males and females that if you provide like for her mom. She would come over. Long as she didn't come over drunk or anything like that, she can come and spend time with her- with the baby. If I was cooking dinner, I'd set a plate for both of them and I go upstairs. Nine times out of ten, in a relationship, they're not really concerned when they're not with you or there's a break right, with really the child. They're concerned about you. So if you let them come in and show no resistance and stuff like that as far as, you know what I mean? Any arguing or

(9) The "open door" policy was an interesting moment. Theoretically, I first thought, the "open door" policy was supposed to be designed to allow both parents to share time with a child without fighting. The claim that it had never failed, that it was a 100% effective, I thought, was made on the basis of bringing together parents without conflict. So I was duly impressed at the time of the interview. Yet when I re-read this section I realized that the main purpose of the policy was to keep annoying partners (mainly

anything like that, they stop coming. They stop coming. And it works. And the order with that was doing was still showing that you guys had a viable relationship without the yelling and the screaming and upsetting the baby. Because when you guys argue, the baby's getting upset. Due to open-door policy, as long as that person didn't come inebriated or anything like that, you let them in and you say "Well okay, you want to..." It's the proper time. Now they have to come at a proper time. A little bit of notification would be fine but if they just came in and it was the proper time, tell them "Come on in and spend time with your children." And you backup. You go where you go. You know what I mean? If you go upstairs, you go upstairs but you let them spend time. And after a while when she is seeing that she wasn't getting on my nerves, you know what I mean? She stopped coming.

SC: Where is the mom now, Do you know? No?

L: I don't think she has seen her in good eight or nine years and she has hostility about that.

SC: She was upset at you when she's...

L: Oh she was upset with me, about me because...

SC: You're speaking about?

L: My daughter.

SC: Your daughter.

L: Yes, she was upset at me for a long time because like I explained to you before and, you know, the mental effect of her being the odd one out, I didn't pay attention to it when I should have. That's a

mothers, obviously) from their controlling behavior. If you do not oppose resistance to them coming to see their children, and treat them nicely, after a while they stop coming because they were never interested in seeing the child, but only in checking in on the other parent. Its claim to effectiveness therefore, is made on the basis of its ability to keep parents away, supposedly in the best interest of the child. Although this may be necessary, I am still trying to digest this... Would Lamar still endorse this policy if it was designed to keep men away?

word of what we need to do. When the other person is missing, particularly if the mom is missing, because usually the mom is not missing in these households, so my daughter was going to school with 99.5% of the people that just had mothers. She was the only one that had a father. Well kids respected the fact that what she did... But they can tease her because she was the odd one out. You see what I mean? "What is your daddy, a faggot?" Because you know, I braid her hair and you know what I mean, and everything will be nice but you know kids are vicious! You know what I mean? So they will say "Well my mom read us a bed story this other night, did you get a bit?" "Well my dad read it, you know, bed story." They can tease her. "So you ain't got no mother? Dadadadadada..." You know what I mean? So you know, I didn't pay attention to a lot of those effects, you know what I mean? Which I should have. I paid attention to it but I was like "Sweetheart they're just jealous of the fact that you have a father and you know that they're always coming around and you know they always, you know, want my advise on different things." I said "In actuality, they really, you know think that you're, you know, you're the good one because you have a dad. They don't have a dad." But then there was so many of them that didn't, you know that mean? They could tease her, you know I mean? So you could- you'll have to go through that. And you know a couple of times, she would be suspended and I disdn't know why she got suspended and she was protecting me. You know what I mean? But at that time I wasn't trying to hear that. "You got suspended for what reason?" You know what I mean? But it can be, you know that's, that's peer pressure. You know what I mean? That's that bullying aspect. I mean and I know that now because she

told... She said "You know dad, they would just tease me all the time." You know what I mean? But then, it used to make me mad because as soon as they come to the house, they all wanted to be around you or when there was field trips and stuff like that, you know it was like she didn't have her dad because I'm going to meetings with her, dragging her into meetings and stuff like that and always dealing with kids and fathers and whatnot and then here we're going to field trips, you know what I mean? That don't have fathers, I'm the only father there. You know what I mean? So it got to the point where they started saying "Well, how can we attract more fathers?" And I say well, it's through your wordification. Your wordification is discriminatory. They say "What do you mean?" "Mother-child day, why can't it be parent-child day? Why does this have to be mother-child day? See this is offensive but see I was going to support my daughter so I didn't care if you put mother... But most men ain't going to look at that. Their going to think they're not invited." You know I mean? "You want men then you gotta take at the specific woman stuff here and you gotta make it equal, so why can't you say parent-child day?" I mean it took a little bit of resistance for them because the mothers, they're all like a PTA! They... You know I mean? Then all of a sudden one said "It does make sense." You know what I mean? So you know you have resistance because you get a lot of people that put that stuff together. You know what I mean? And they're proud about they have this mother-child day, a mother-child movie night. "Well indirectly what you're saying is I'm not allowed because I'm a father." "No, we're not saying that." "No, you're not saying that, the paper saying that." So as soon as I see it... That's for mama. You know what I mean? So as a

(10) Lamar's ability to point the obvious but not seen comes clearly from being the exception. The question posed ("how can we attract more fathers to PTA activities and meetings?) never clashes with language like "mother-child day" or "mother-child movie night" unless you are a single and involved father. Lamar only had to state the obvious: if you want fathers here first change the language to reflect that, otherwise all your other efforts will be null.

male, I'm good (10)

SC: I'm the mom. I'm the dad..  
Everything.

L: Right. So from my viewpoint I am the mom, the dad and everything and so I was going to it. And a lot of times I was the only father there. And it made no difference. I was fine because she started bringing on me wanting to get the education. She starts... She brought a hunger on for me too. (11)

SC: OK.

L: To want to change my life and to be successful, to be known. They already know what I used to do, so you imagine me coming into the jail, public defender on the pod and I come walking down in here. We was hustling not too long ago. You knew you was all right. You know what I mean? You knew you was in good... That's my man there! Oh when did you start... When were you going to law school? I never went to law school. You see what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah.

L: But now I'm supervising Allegheny County Jail for the public defender's office so I'm doing this and I'm helping people that I didn't get along with the street. Now, I got another friend for life. You see what I mean? So now I'm in the service business of what I'm doing and I bring commitment to the jail. M.E. is still at H.S. I bring them into the jail servicing fathers, doing anger management, parenting. The judges has taken our credibility. I said "Okay, you went to them. That's it. That's cool." Now mind you, three of the judges had already been my bosses at the public defender's office from L. M., K. S. you

(11) This was a key moment for me personally. I have argued previously that I see the call to fatherhood as a call to ethics, a call to change one's relationship with the world to reflect a concern for another human being that will occupy it after I'm gone. Lamar here makes a statement to how the birth of his daughter also brought a hunger to get an education, to improve himself which led him to the public defender's office. Here is therefore a man, who was a drug dealer and had been incarcerated for it working some time later for the public defenders office thanks to a tiny baby girl. It is a remarkable change.

know what I mean? So it went like that. So I mean we're really doing well as far as you know, helping and servicing.

SC: But you learnt... Not the job itself but the job of being a dad, you learnt that kind of on the- on the go.

L: See, I had to educate myself because I was losing the fight down there. They knew that I didn't know how to fight down there at Family Division but, then you know, I've always been an intelligent person. You look at this entity and they named it division, when they gave me a little bit of this "edumacation" here, huh? What does division mean? It means to divide. So you never holistically had a these families' best interest at heart anyway. This is a money game. You see what I mean? They get paid for each of one of these cases down there. Why do you think they gave money? They'd get part of that money that you send in. They get it. They want your money. That's why they're so hostile down here toward you. You see what I mean? You wasn't educated. The laws was geared for the females so they didn't have to know the laws because they had attorneys! That was appointed to them! Who was fighting for men's rights? Nobody. Still there's no attorneys that fight for men's rights in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that I know of. (12)

SC: And there is for women?

L: Yeah! Yeah! It was always unfair so you standing in front of an attorney and he's blasting you and you're sitting there like "What? What did he just say?" You know what I mean? Because you don't know. The Commonwealth gives them their attorney. So you have this male that's standing there and the only way that he is

(12) Lamar highlights here the economic conflict in which courts can finds themselves into, and plays, like other father interviewed here, with the wording of Family Division so as to highlight its supposed hypocritical position in regards to families. He was the only one to point to economic interests as a factor. It reminded me of the money involve in the prison complex, and the kickback many judges receive per inmate they to certain private penitentiaries. Lamar himself would bring this example up later on.

learning is through getting slashed and getting his butt whooped through the system continually doing this. And then now I got to look up stuff because I can't pay an attorney. I got children I got to support here that you're saying that I'm supporting, so I can't afford an attorney. Do you think they'll appoint me an attorney? No. Do you think they'll appoint you an attorney? I don't think so. This ain't going to happen. It's better now so just imagine how it was then. A lot of these guys are spoiled even to this fact because they can put in for their children, they can get their children but they don't know the blood, sweat and tears that we had to go through for them to be able to have a lot of the rights that they have now. You have a perfect opportunity to interview the true fighters of this because they're still living. This is history, this is nothing but history. What you see now is from what we lay down for, that we protested against. That when I say to you, "You ain't going to be a judge next year messing around with me like this and, you know what I mean, taking away my rights and doing this and you're throwing big words at me that absolutely meant nothing because they're in Latin. It was scaring the living daylight out of me yet." I said, "What? I think I'm going to jail for awhile because you don't know." "Well, you need to get us our money, you need to do this, that and the other" but you're taking out my checks and you are taking it automatically so I'm paying you. Oh, you need to track the money. And it would say then, you know, "You guys are illegal because before you was moving the money everybody was in default," which makes you pay to the system. So they got you going around. Not only are you paying this, and now you got to pay a bond to get out of jail. So they're smacking you two-fold thinking, you know what I minute,

(13) Lamar's comment provides a view point, a very specific lens that show how intimidating court can be for a black man with limited education and knowledge of the law and his rights. He never mentions race here, but I can't help thinking that my experience would have been much different by the mere fact of having a clearer skin. His statement "You are throwing big words at me that absolutely mean nothing because they are in Latin" shows that disparity between the language of the legal system and that of an uneducated individual. If the accused cannot understand what is being said, how fair is that?



you don't know. So I started learning how to write motions and different things like that, putting in the proper paperwork, and I started teaching it. As I would go along with something and I learn it, I teach it. Do you see what I'm saying? Then I started supporting them down at the hearings and whatnot. (13)

SC: And you had your daughter with you all the time?

L: All the time.

SC: So that was not a – you have never had your daughter taken away from you or anything like that?

L: Oh yeah, I had a big case. I changed CYF. They took my child, the kidnapped her. And they kidnapped her on the fact of my knowledge of knowing, trying to punish me. I'm at the Public Defender's Office. You know what I mean? And me coming up, man, shoot -- the father that was in – the father that was in my life he'd tear your neck off and stuff your foot in it. It didn't mean nothing. It just meant whatever you did was so dumb, it constitutes me tearing your head up. You know what I mean? It's a different culture. So my daughter got suspended. She knows she had to deal with me. They called down the Public Defender's Office. I called and I said, "Well, you know, go to her class and get her and bring her to the phone." Instead of just bringing her to the phone, the principal goes and says, "I have your father on the phone. Oh, he's going to lay in to you." See, now you got scared child that's going to probably say any damn thing to get out of trouble. You know what I mean? "I don't know my -- you send me home, my dad is going to beat me with pipes." What type of sense does that make? Do you know what I

mean? So I go up to R. and I'm confronted with a CYF worker. And I said, "Listen, you have no rights to take my child. I'm taking my child. What's going on here? You have no visible marks, no nothing, no broken bones, not anything – what is this?" So, I checked her. So when I checked her, her supervisor come knocked. I checked her supervisor too legally. They took my child. Now, I'm fighting – now, once your child get in the system, they immediately have one of these hearings where they, you know, they give her to a foster parent. Now, even to their book, they were supposed to put my child with immediate family. They took my child to C. and I had to fight...

SC: How old was she?

L: Tasha was eight. I never got the same child back, never. You know what I mean? So that right there was so strange.

SC: How long?

L: They kept her for three months, three months. I had to wait all that time. Now, in meantime, this child had never ever been away from me, never ever. And they wrecked her world. Now I have a child that's so defensive. I felt that she had to protect herself because you had her in a situation – he was telling her business. So she's in schools in C. and fighting. You know what I mean? She's fighting to protect herself but she's still trying to protect Dad, what's going on here? Do you know what I mean? They kidnapped my child and they wanted me to shut up and I wouldn't shut up. You pissed me off. Do you know what I mean? And imagine being in this house without that baby, hearing her. I'm going to tell you deep stuff. Hearing her in that room but I couldn't get to her. It goes through me

(14) During the interview this story had me almost in tears. Lamar became very agitated while telling it, the memories so disturbing it was as if he was back there, going through it again. His voice shook in anger, his eyes became watery and his hands turned into fists. Listening to him I thought of my son, how I would have reacted if they had taken him away... It is a Kafkian story of absurdity, impotence and pain. They took his daughter without any signs or history of abuse for three months. My question throughout was, what role did he being black and reactive play? Would they have taken her if he hadn't fit the role of angry black man as clearly as he probably did? If he hadn't been a single

now. Do you hear what I'm saying to you? Because I never got the same child back, never, different child, different child. Even though they changed the laws and they did things and – you know what I mean? And they start doing things correctly, it affected my child. And she's affected to this day about this stuff. Because I didn't know what the hell they were doing to her. Do you see what I mean? I couldn't protect her. When I requested, "Where was you at to protect me, dad?" Man, I broke down. They stole my child in order to punish me, you – I'm telling the papers, "You kidnapped my child," and you did. You didn't have a legal bone to take that child. So I get everything, subpoena, the records and stuff like that, no marks on my child, no broken bone -- how could you take my child? Why? Because I hit you with the law that you couldn't and you did it and – now, they will get fired. But that's how it was supposed to be. You kidnapped my baby and you thought I was going to sit back and say nothing. (14

(Interview gets interrupted by a visitor)

SC: When did you get cancer?

L: I got cancer two year ago. Take a Father to School Day actually, it was the time I found out, because me and Brother M. are the star to Take a Father to School Day. We gave it to M. B. because he was in the school district but we're the originators of Take a Father to School Day in which we participate. We had done some speaking two years ago. I spoken in north side and whatnot. And later on that night I was out and went to a friend's house. And I'm always, at the time, in a tie and shirt, do you know I mean? I'm always in a tie and shirt. It was probably the only time you'd see me relax. And I'm

father with a daughter? Lamar stated that the child he got back after three months was never the same... How do you make up for something like that? How do those actions justify the best interest of the child?

thinking that it was hot in the house but if you're talking, I'm not trying to interrupt you. And I waited too long and I jumped up. Before I can get to the screen door I passed out, hit some bricks and stuff like that. My neck was swollen but it didn't hurt. And my son talked me into going to the hospital the next day. Being stubborn as a male, you know, males don't like hospitals and we don't do check-ups or whatever, that's what the stereotype is. I ended up going to the hospital the next day and I passed out, I blacked out, I was messed up. So when they started going in there, the mess, they couldn't tell what it was and then all of a sudden they did a biopsy and whatnot, and they found out I have cancer.

SC: What kind of cancer?

L: It was Hodgkin's lymphoma. It was the same thing that Mario Lemieux had. One other thing they asked me, they say, "Have you ever been to Africa for you to get this cancer?" And I said, "No. Homewood." And I honestly think I got the cancer from the yard. That is where I got the cancer from.

SC: Why is that?

L: Because when they would tear down the houses, when they torn down the house that used to stand next to my yard that I fenced in, they were filling them with washers, dryers, all type of stuff, all type chemicals and stuff. So my house was leaking one year and I dug out from the wall. And I was picking up bags and toiletry, clothes, everything you could imagine was in that yard that they used to fill in. Do you know what I mean? So that's where I think I got it- they can't tell me where I got but that's where I think I got because this Hodgkin's lymphoma is

(15) "Have you ever been to Africa? No. Homewood." At first I thought this statement was funny, and his evaluation of how he got cancer ("the yard") far-fetched, but the more I think about it I wonder... Clearly rates of cancer and other diseases are higher within black communities and working class communities than within middle and upper class ones. Regulations about what can be dumped and where it can be dumped and the ability to enforce them are part of that difference. Who is

supposed to be a young man's cancer and I'm half a hundred. Why did I get this? Do you know what I mean? I'm like, "Hi, I got a young man's cancer." I mean, you know, it was so was just... (15)

SC: How is it now?

L: Well, I still have this port in my chest and I got to keep them for two years. Thank God the cancer so far is gone but you – I have read and seen some stories where people's cancer come back. Do you know what I mean? So it's not that I want to die or anything and I'll be truthful, I'm afraid to die alone. Do you know what I mean? But I don't want that no more. I believe all the medicines and the poisons that they put in my body, you know -- but it woke me up. Everything has a purpose because it showed me that now that we had to be on a mission in making fathers or make sure that the young men at the middle school age start getting checkups. And once they get to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade it will be hereditary for them. You know what I mean? So we got to break the stereotype that men are – which we were afraid through history of going to the hospitals. You got to back forward in our history. See, again, you're talking to a person that knows this history. So, you know, I don't do flu shot because the shot – the white guys with the syphilis -- do you know what I mean? That's history. You know what I mean? So a lot of us don't do the doctors because of what we hear from family and – you know what I mean -- the older family on why they didn't go to... the atrocities, you know what I mean? Who wants to go through that? You know what I mean? So that's why we have to break the stereotype on that. And there was one other thing that I would want to do with the father's organization is to have fathers support the people with cancer that don't have

to say? As I was to find out later, Hodgkin lymphoma can be brought on, and often is, through exposure to different types of toxins, so perhaps his explanation was not so far-fetched.

(16) Lamar's ideas here and below impressed me, as they extended the function of fatherhood and the role of responsibility from merely taking care of your children to taking care of one's health, but also helping others take care of their health, going with fathers to the doctor for peer support, emphasizing prevention within communities where illness is a major factor and helping provide overall education and resources to families. It was one of the moments in which Lamar's vision of responsible fatherhood expanded to care for the community, to, in my view, the realm of ethics.

families. You know what I mean? Because it was just amazing the things I thought I heard that my mom and aunt say, "They didn't say that." You know what I mean? I heard what I thought -- I heard what I wanted to hear instead of what was really said. (16)

SC: Do you mean by the doctors?

L: Yes, yes, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, big time. You know? And you need to have people or your father is going to -- and we need to get screened for more than just high blood pressure and different things like this -- this cancer is killing more black people in these areas because just the unknown and ain't nobody getting screened for it. What about the things that no one is screening for that you can go -- you can go to a free health clinic, a fair and get a blood pressure thing. How about taking some blood and seeing if I got some cancer or some different things like that? So we have to up our game. And I think that one of the things that woke me up was seeing little kids not playing because they had cancer, because before I was like, "Why Me?" So I entered that cancer center. You know what I mean? And when I entered that cancer center, the teaching start coming in and giving people confidence and say, "Hey,"-- you know what I mean -- "Come on. We can get through this" knowing that I was messed up. And I see this little kid going past with cancer who got a little brain skull cap on just as happy as they want to be, not complaining about the tubes that's hanging out of them and different things like that. And I'm sitting here complaining. We need to have guys supporting fathers about getting checkups. You don't even have to have cancer. But if you have father -- if you can come with me every time I have a check up, wouldn't that be something

(17) "When I entered that cancer center, the teaching started coming..." I was blown away at both how the impression I got from this man was that he was really stuck in his ways, closed to change, and yet time after time he showed how open he was to experience. I have walked into an oncology ward at a children's hospital... there are few things as humbling as that. I can empathize with his reaction, even if I

spectacular? You know what I mean? And we keep a luxury of – you know what I mean? Wouldn't that be – that would be something nice. We're sitting down with the cancer doctors now because we're trying to put together a warning book that can go in every household. You know what I mean? And I'm going to start try to get some funding for that because I want it as a little book. I don't want it as a three a fold. I want it as a little book of five warnings that in everybody's household that a male – that a female can look at and see my husband or my – is going through one of this, call this number. Do you know what I mean? (17)

SC: Yeah.

L: That's what we need to do.

SC: Sounds like you're still learning on the job too about responsibility and advice.

L: Yes.

SC: I mean cancer made you think responsibility is having the checkups so you can be there for you kids.

L: Exactly.

SC: So you can be there for...

L: Yes. And we have to be healthy as fathers, and that's another thing of responsibility just like you stated. You can't do anything when you're sick. Do you understand?

SC: Yeah.

L: The only thing, you know, I love my daughter to death but that scared the living shit out of her when dad is up in that bathroom throwing up in a fetal position,

have never had cancer...

(18) "You can't do anything when you are sick." Lamar highlights the importance of health as a parent. As he

butt naked and she can't – she's stripping. She's 19 at the time. You know what I mean? She is – it went -- it just went from here to here, from me never being sick to me having cancer. And she's – she couldn't handle it at first. Then she started – you know what I mean -- getting used to it because my mom and my auntie, if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here. Every appointment, every surgery they were there. I mean, me and my mom had issues before. You know what I mean? You see that's the thing about responsibility. When your kids need you, you're going to be there regardless of the point of whatever. It ain't financial, it's about you being there, her being there, family being there. Do you know what I mean? Because a lot of times just a phone call, a phone call from you would have been uplifting to what I was going through in here. Do you understand? Just to hear somebody's voice that I knew. Do you know what I mean? (18)

SC: Yeah.

L: Those are the small things but they are the best things. You know what I mean? So the cancer it put me in another light of what needs to be done. You know what I mean? We don't look for credit for the things we've done and changing laws in this city and doing – we might not even get the recognition for the things we've done but they have changed, they're done, it's time to move on to something else that needs to be done, that's critical and that's where I'm at. (19)

SC: What are some of the main things, the main impediments to fathers being responsible that you see for black fathers? So what are some of the impediments for them? And you've pointed out things, so I want to be also, you know, some of the

said that I realized that whenever I have been sick my wife has taken over, and vice-versa. I have been frustrated, but never scared for my children because of being sick. As a single parent, being sick means your children may not have anybody beyond you. If that sickness on top of that, is cancer, then I can't imagine the fear...

(19) His daughter provided the first impulse, and cancer, as he describes it here, has provided the second. I could see Lamar's energy and desire to move on to something new, to do something significant in the future. I knew his cancer was in remission but it made me think he was still living with the fear that it might return...



point that issues with the system, family division, stuff like that, right? You've pointed out...

L: It gives us the -- it's the history, it's the legacy, it's the -- in order to be a good a father you have to; one, have good health. Two, get education, has to be improved or it needs to be there. Three is the financial responsibility of being able to do that. And once you have all three of those and you're not going to have that in a depression or recession. And then you have the fact that a lot of men have to learn the system, they have to educate themselves on the system in order to fight. And you can't fight if you don't know, you just can't do it. So in order for you to -- before these black men to come out of it is that they have to be taught by the ones who have the experience in life. Do you understand? I don't go book knowledge, don't come in there and tell me something that you read in a book. And many people have written books that don't have children, talking about -- you know what I mean -- their sisters have children but come on, you don't know nothing about being a father until you have one to deal with. Then you can tell me about -- you know what I mean -- talking to me about what has to go on. So we have a lot fathers who just don't know because they've been raised by moms and they're going on what they think it is to be a man. You know what I mean? A lot of men walked over -- they're learning how to be a man by taking a 40 count and smoking a blunt. And I blew my mind when the young boys told us that -- one time they told us that one of the things was to shoot a cop or shoot someone to be a man. You got to watch what this -- see, that's why -- see, the downfall of this is that they don't have after-school programs in order for father's programs to be able to nurture

(20) The assumption implied here: that men that are raised by mothers are not the same as men raised by fathers, is, I think, such a dangerous one, but so powerful ideologically. It makes mothers to be weak parents unable to raise men. Whenever I hear this I wonder if people like Lamar see the opposite -- the absence of a mother -- as

these young men. You see what I'm saying? They're on the streets after school. When I was coming up you had a little program to go to. Do you know what I mean? It was basketball, night gym – you know what I mean? Even a movie type role thing that we did. That's a good thing to be able to bond. We have to – we have to find out how of many of these young men that don't have fathers and have conversations like we had. It's how they learn. They don't have the elders coming together and teaching the history to them. And it's different with our race too because our race – I mean even though, you know, we got a lot of professors, teachers and whatnot, but we still got a lot of people that – I know guys that can't read that can fix you're car. Do you understand what I'm saying? (20)

SC: They can't read but they can fix your car.

L: They can fix you car. They can't read. They can fix your car fantastic and they might not call it a piece that you call it but the – what I'm saying – their -- the trait, meaning they're good with their hands. Do you know what I mean. I know guys that they can't read but they can do a lot of different things. And, you know, there are a lot of fathers out here that can't read, they're afraid to come to us because they can't read. You know what I mean? So how do we help it? We help it – we don't – we solve the problem by having the people that they know and in your community that been through life experiences that they can trust. You see what I'm saying? Because a lot of times, you know, if we want to teach our children something, they won't have somebody from Mt. Lebo or somebody – I'm just giving example -- that's coming in the hood and they're leaving the hood. He's

causing similar problems. Clearly his daughter is not taking a 40-count and smoking a blunt (she is in college) so the argument is that you need fathers, but not necessarily mothers? My guess is he would say you also need mothers, but from all his arguments here it is pretty clear that if one has to choose, fathers would seem like the better choice in guaranteeing a better future for children. An argument like this, based on gender and not the qualities of the parent, is a tragic and mistaken argument, in my opinion.

(21) This reminded me of civil rights' activist Miles Horton. The idea that you are not going to get illiterate black individuals to learn to read through bringing white teachers from Mt. Lebo because the sense of shame is too big, there is no trust and there is too much difference at play. You need individuals within the community to take on that effort. In the case of Miles Horton, it beauticians: Lamar is arguing again for

coming in a Mercedes and he's leaving. At 5:00 he ain't around here. That is what's good in my organization and in that hotline because I answer 24/7. It don't make a difference what time at night. You know, sometimes people just wants somebody to listen to them. You answer the phone. They'd be so stuck on that, they're not answering the phone. What can I do for you? Do you know what I mean? But again, that's the psyche of us, you know. Then I'll stop a fight him and this girl might be fighting 3:00 in the morning and they call my hotline and I'm there. You two need to get two pieces of paper. You write down five things you dislike. And you write down five things you dislike. And then after that you write down three things that you love about him and you love about -- do you know what I mean? And I get down with them. Yeah, all right. That goes on all night sometimes. You know what I mean? But who answers the phone 2:00-3:00 in the morning? Not many of these crisis places, man. You what I mean? So we got everything messed up. And we had it messed up through how the system is. You got a society that's not dependent but you can only get help sometimes. My problem ain't from 9:00 to 5:00. My problems are from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM because that's when you got the circumference where stuff can happen. You see what I mean? So what happened to the 24-hour Father's Programs? What happened to the 24-hour mother's program, 24-hour assistance? The only thing you get 24 hours is the police. (21) (22)

SC: And they come after the fact.

L: Exactly. You know what I mean? And they're not addressing what triggers me. See, I deal with triggers. The trigger effect

fathers to take that role.

(22) Lamar's argument that the programs designed to help poor black communities are inefficient and poorly designed is well taken. If the problems are between 6 PM and 6 AM and the only thing open within that time frame is the police -which always arrive after the fact- what message does that send?

that if I got to get this car on a car, in which I've done, drive to the north side to stop you from shooting someone, that's what I'll do. And I drove my baby when she was younger to – you know what I mean -- because we have to get up – you know what I mean -- or take a family food. See, you're not there for their needs. You know what I mean? You stop a guy from robbing somebody if he got food in his house. He even less likely to – you know what I mean? Its common sense but they don't look at it. Do you see what I mean?

SC: So you're bringing food?

L: Yeah. I have emptied my own refrigerator out many times, many times – you know what I mean -- because you have to. You know what I mean? Everybody not doing – I mean they might think I'm doing well. I ain't doing well but, you know what I mean, they're doing worst. So what do you think a person is going to do if you sees you sitting over there eating three hotdogs and he ain't eaten in three days. You have a problem. You ain't got to be messing with him. You are messing with him because you got the three hotdogs. You know what I mean? So it ain't personal. I'm hungry, that's how simple it is. So in order to – in order to get him back to what you – the question you asked me, in order to do those things, those things have to be provided. But what I understand a person told me in Germany, it's already provided for you. A lot of the different things -- the society is not like this over here. Then how come we're not taking a lesson from over there and bringing it here? You know what I mean? And make you get a trade, make you go to – make you work, make sure that you, you know – you know, it's a lot of things that you tend to look at through the history -- this society is

(23) The idea that America needs to learn from European governments made me smile. Anything European these days is considered socialism in the US, all despite the fact that Germany, England, France and Spain all have right-wing governments at the moment. And their failures (which are the failures of capitalism all over the world) are associated with social policies such as those Lamar claims for that have little to do with the problems that have made Europe crumble, but that will serve to prevent any type of policy aimed at increasing economic equality in the US. As bad as they have been, it is better to ask for wars than for social programs... Killing in many circles is better seen than helping others. Watching the republican presidential debates confirms that. Of course, Lamar's argument is practical. You are not helping provide the needs of the people, and when you don't, as a society, bad

doomed to fail. You don't – they're just uprising in NY and you're – and they ain't going to come here? These college kids is about ready to take things to the streets and when they do, it's going to be crazy, it's just going to be crazy because they're tired of it. Why are you going for the education when you can't get a job? If these college kids can't get a job and then you're a minority, you can't a job in this area, you can't get a job and you see that everything is tearing down but then you have responsibilities. You see, this is how you run into problems because now I don't have. And then you have and then I'm trying to get it but you have, now I got to come and visit you because you have, I need. That's what it is. You're not supplying the needs. If you supply the needs of the people, you got to – you got to give these – you got to give these guys leadership, the whole family. You got to quit working with just one. You got to work with the whole family. See, their money is in the children, what's on the best interest of the child -- what's in the best interest of the child if he was really serious about what you're doing, is to make sure – even if the mother and the father are not together, that they have a holistic relationship in order to raise this child, period. If they see us getting along, no matter we hate each other, you can't get along for 10 minutes -- do you know what I mean? So these are things that need to be seriously talked now that we got the structure of the system build in where a father can get his child, now let's learn how to act. (23) (24)

SC: So part of you had gone, you know – there's a whole question of what is responsible fatherhood. I keep on hearing things. I'm going to – you mentioned there, one of the things it's to have a holistic relationship with the mother,

things happen. Social programs –such as RF programs and Lamar's own family/father program– help fill that void.

(24) Lamar makes an argument for working with the whole family at various points during the interview, and it would be hard to argue against that. But of course, his "open door" policy seems to be designed with the purpose of keeping one parent away. And there were times in which I wondered if he would have felt the same had the majority of single parents been fathers. Would he be fighting as hard to bring mothers back into the picture?

which may not imply that you two like each other, but that you can get along, is that the idea?

L: Right. Again, that's what teaching the open-door policy. You understand what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah.

L: My daughter will say to you, I've never heard my dad say nothing bad about my mom, but I heard my mom always trying to put down my dad trying to find out what my dad is doing. Do you see what I'm saying? That's that relationship part; do you see what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah.

L: I wouldn't get into that. I just want -- I get in to -- and I didn't care whatever she said that made me -- it could really make mad. I'd say, well, you know what I mean? I just didn't get in to it. It takes two to fight; do you know what I mean? But I'm thinking about the effect if I get in to this argument, what for -- what's it going to do for her? You know what I mean? You you're looking out what's for the best interest of the child. The best interest for the child for me was not to answer that question. Or to go, you know, not to even get in to that. But we don't even worry about that now. We got other things we need to do. You got your homework done? Do you know what I mean? How you just get around it and just go around it. And some things is just not for children to know until they get older. You don't want to take the beauty of the child. And that's what we need to do, we need to -- if we're trying to deal with these factors, we have to do with the family holistically. Because you can do all the teaching you want to. If you send and say

you're the educated one, you can do all the teachings you want to. But if you send her back to momma and momma's a knucklehead, what do you think? Ninety-five percent of this stuff -- the knucklehead stuff is what they're going to learn. They're going to be learning to educate -- they'll decipher when they get older, 99% of this stuff is knucklehead over here. Do you see what I'm saying?

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: So -- we are doing it backwards because we're grabbing these children and we're teaching them to say, yes, sir, no, sir. But when they go home, they're hearing, bitch. (25)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: You know what I mean?

SC: Yeah.

L: This and then the other, then you wonder when they come back to school, the teacher's saying, well, I taught you to say this and you're not saying that, you're saying this, because most of my time is here.

SC: Uh-hmm

L: You see what I'm saying? Then you got the whole household saying this. So I got to act. When they're in Rome, you do what? You act like the Romans. That's how it is. So, until we start holistically grabbing the family as a unit and making mandatory for the mother and father to come to the class so that they could see exactly what's the problem, because you don't know what they learn. You can't tell me I'm wrong if that's how I was raised and you didn't show me no other way.

(25) The claim of Lamar that we are doing it backwards is ultimately a claim for intervention at the level of home-life, of the couple or single parent. It is not enough with school programs because parents have a massive influence on the upbringing of children so if you really are invested in change then you need to intervene at every level, the earlier the better. The problem, of course, is that the intervention has to come from within the community itself (churches, community programs, etc). or those interventions will be seen, as he highlights below, as violent, not helpful.

And that's what's wrong. So, you know, the way on how to be a man, you're telling me by penalizing me. You're not going to teach me anything penalizing me because I'm already upset because you penalize me. So -- and then you take my freedom. Instead of saying, well, this is how or this is what you need to do. What if I don't know? You know, a lady once said to me, I don't understand why the black community, you know, the black women getting beaten by the men they're with. What if that's all they know? What if that's all she saw? What if that's what they think that -- see, you get a female and she sees her dad beating her mom. She thinks that's what she -- that needs to occur to her and then they make up. Do you understand what I'm saying? (26)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: So she thinks that's what needs to be done. You see the male, he's looking at this, he thinks he's supposed to beat the female in order to get what he needs to get done. So, how are you telling that ain't wrong if that's the only way they know? Don't come tell me I'm wrong, show me another way. Now, I can decipher what's right or wrong.

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: Instead of you penalizing me. Now I'm upset. And now you want to try to teach me something after you penalize me? I'm not doing it because you -- I'm doing it because I have to. Do you know what I mean? So, a lot of -- and this is coming straight from being in the hood, back living in the hood trying to beautify the hood, you know what I mean? This is my home. We don't have these guys. See, you got a different society, you got more money being made in the history of the

(26) Lamar tries to argue that the problem of domestic violence is one of education. Men and women need to be taught how to relate to each other without violence. Although I do agree that is part of the issue, I was surprised that Lamar did not mention any structural factors here, such as poverty, lack of jobs, education, and just an overall lack of opportunities for success.

(27) I remember this moment in the interview clearly..."What is wrong with



world by these young black, uneducated guys that's playing football. What's wrong with the hood? It's still the hood. Because there nobody came and invested no money where it should have been. If you're recall, give me -- tell you what, let me get -- let me get a couple million dollars, all you'll will be all right. You don't have to worry about you because you are in a father's program, where you wouldn't have to worry about you son getting a scholarship. Here. That's what it's supposed to be. I would keep at home. Why keep it out there somewhere trying to be something they ain't? You know what I mean? (27)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: So, these guys are making money. Again, it goes back to the dumb theory. Because when I was coming up, he was dumb, you have that dumb track on your head. There ain't nobody follow you. Now you taking where these young men, they don't have to be really educated because they don't know that because you have society in the system frame on the fact that they can run this ball or they can dunk this ball. So, you giving this man a \$100 million, but you ain't giving him no social skills, no -- you know what I mean? No financial skills. He's still uneducated. He's just an uneducated motherfucker with money, right?

SC: Yeah.

L: You know what I mean? And he's hostile, he's still violent, he's still everything that he portrayed, but now he has money to do any and everything he wants to do, then you incarcerate him for being himself? Such as Mike Tyson's, you see what I'm saying? Your Plaxicos...

SC: Yeah.

the hood? It is still the hood." Sitting at his house, in the middle of Homewood, with the front door half ripped open from a attempted break-in a few nights before and having heard a few stories about shootings in that block before we started the interview, I suddenly became aware again I was in the hood. I thought of the boarded houses I had driven by coming in, the lack of shops of any kind around the area, the beat-up gas station across the street and the couple of bars a little down and I thought, I would not like to live here, to have to raise my children like this. But I have a choice...

L: Do you see what I'm saying? Santonio Holmes...you know what I mean? You can go down the line. You can go down the line. You pimpin' these people for their skills but you ain't educating them on what they need to be educated. I say, you're affecting us in the wrong way. Because now, the emphasis ain't on this mother for that kid to be a doctor. The emphasis is for that kid to be on that TV running that football making more than a doctor.

SC: Right.

L: And uneducated. So if that fool gets hurt, that's why they got the football fund for him. Football player now that's in the league because a lot of them was getting hurt, wasn't educated, didn't have anything to fall back on, it was months. Do you see what I mean?

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: So now they're doing better with that but you're still -- you're still pimping these areas. You see the long lasting effect. Just think if you had the education like you had the football. That people filled the stands for education or science fairs like they do the football stadium. That's how you help my black men. Do you understand what I'm saying? (28)

SC: Yeah.

L: We've been bamboozled for a long time. A lot of us are hostile to the fact, you know what I mean? In this new generation that's coming up with no work ethic, no ethics because the system is telling you how to raise your family, they ain't liking that. I'm not talking abuse. Sometimes, all these children needs --

(28) I thought during the interview that this was such a beautiful vision: stands in a stadium filled to the top for graduating students, or for science fairs, or for outstanding students and community entrepreneurs ... It felt like a deep moment in the interview. Lamar was on a roll by now... he was clearly comfortable and was going to let me know what he thought, and I must say I was absorbed.

(29) This reminded me of Hunter's interview, his argument that the system interferes to such an extent that you can't discipline a child. But of course, I

some of them need their ass whooped, for real. (29)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: That's what they need, you know what I mean? I mean, we're not talking abuse, but some of them need discipline.

SC: Right.

L: So they don't learn discipline until they head to jail because you ain't going to talk that way to the CO, you ain't going to talk that way to them because they're going to pull that pin and you're going to get your butt beat. But out here in society, they'd say you ain't got to listen to your mom or your dad, we will arrest them. That makes sense to you? That don't make sense. Especially while they're still building penitentiaries in the desert, and the privatization of penitentiaries... this is legalized slavery. So, you wonder what our confidence level is? (30)

SC: Right.

L: You're not anything because you can't run that ball. You know, me, T.S. brother M., because I had, you know, using one -- a good program was working for the kids, the funding leaves. So, you know, the funding left, because I was stopping the kids from going to the office, going to the magistrate, you know what I mean? By talking to them; having them greet properly, having the guys open doors for them when they -- like the females when they come in, you know what I mean? Sitting there, I had to -- honor role students were the ones that wasn't doing well and they were discussing their days. They clowned a young lady because she said she wanted to be a veterinarian. They made her feel so little until Mr. D. says, wait,

wondered, if we are stating that couples need to be educated so as to not beat each other up, shouldn't they be educated on how to "discipline" a child also. My problem in re-reading this is that I am not sure that by "discipline" everyone means the same thing.

(30) The "legalized slavery" argument reminded me of Michelle Alexander's new book "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness," and the role that incarceration as a marking has to keep millions of people from not participating in society even long after they are out of jail.

31. This was such a great story. Lamar turned a girl that may have completely

“what are you guys laughing at?” How many of you -- your family members got dogs, raise your hand -- cat or any type of animals? They raised their hand. OK. So everybody's family in here got dogs and you know people that got dogs in each your family, correct? Yes. But where's the veterinarian? There is none. So who's the gold? You're teasing her? All of you need to be a veterinarian in this area because that's where it is. This black area doesn't got no veterinarian. I commend this young lady, come here, young lady, and everybody clapped for her. The self-esteem when she came in the next day was tremendous because the first thing I will say, all right -- inner circle -- who had a bad day? So they're discussing their bad days, do you know what I mean? (31)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: And you got the young guys just talking, now that you got somebody that's talking that, you know what I mean? Yeah, but I did this and I did that, you know, everybody's giving an opinion, well, you shouldn't have did this, and they're getting the opinion from their peers. Whatever said in this circle stays in this circle. Then they're waiting for who had a good day. You see what I mean? So I got, who had a good day today? Let's clap. You know what I mean? Explain their good day. See, it's about confidence building. They're not getting that at all. I mean, you got these young kids as what I know I'm going to have to go clean, they are kids who probably have to take care of some of their siblings. You know what I mean? (32)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: It's the best thing to be what it is to be a man because you can -- you know, being a

abandoned her idea to be a veterinarian into a sure path for the future. The morale of the story, I think, is that success within areas such as Homewood is not clearly tied to academic performance. The path is broken, full of bumps, unclear. On the other hand, the path through sports is very clear, yet mostly a fantasy dependent on so many factors, most of them out of the control of the individual. The interview with Lashawn would provide a different look at the role of sports in the area.

32. I could clearly envision this man getting up and clapping for kids, getting them to feel good about themselves and their achievements, providing reinforcement in a way in which they probably rarely do...

man is something that has to be built upon. You're not anointed a man because you have balls. You feeling me? You're just not anointed that. Because I know some old knuckleheads right now that are still doing the same thing they was doing when we was teenagers. So what have they learn? Life is about learning. Relationships is about learning. You have a relationship with your children. And in a relationship, a key to relationship and as being a good man or a good woman is learning from your relationship; knowing what to do in the future and what not to do or repeat that you did wrong. That's building. So you can't expect because this person has the man physique that he's a man. It doesn't work like that. What have you learned? What knowledge do you have to be a teacher? Because that's what you are once you make a child; you are a professor, especially to this child. Because this child's a little what? Computer. And if you don't have the whole computer, the child's going to do what? Like a lot of things. The man and the woman is a whole computer, it's a unit. It sticks together like anything. Whether you're together or not, the wholicity is where you need to be, because you have to compute right and wrong, what needs to be happening, this and that, personality. (33)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: Do you see what I mean?

SC: Yeah.

L: So that's what we are, the professors. The teachers are the ones that are at school. We're the professors. We're supposed to check right and wrong, we're supposed to check hygiene, we're supposed to check mannerism, we're supposed to check these things. So I ask

(33) "You are not anointed a man because you have balls." That was such a powerful quote, and yet such a stereotypical man thing to say. I disagreed on certain things with Lamar, but he had a confidence about him and he spoke with such force and authority it was hard to not be momentarily entranced by what he was saying, even if (as with some of his statements on gender, or homosexuality, for example) you didn't agree with him or if at times he would get lost in some of his own metaphors, such as below, with the computer...

(34) Lamar makes a powerful point here about the "know-how" skills that are so

this question, why isn't there any programs where they show these black children how to have mannerism, the habit, to be able to order from a menu to eat with a fork, a knife and a spoon. We don't have that. We use to have it when I was coming up. It is called etiquette. They don't have it. You have to have a young man confident even if he can't read about going to have a suit to be able to go try to get a job. If he is sitting back -- listening to his boys and the horror stories about when they tried to get a job or he might be lying about it, he ain't going. That's how you -- you build the confidence by doing those type of things; teach them to dress, teach them hygiene, teach them these things. (34)

SC: And teaching all of the how-to...

L: Yes. You watch your son? You watch how your son walk?

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: How does your son walk?

SC: He's confident.

L: Just like his dad.

SC: Yeah.

L: If he -- if he doesn't have that, you know what I mean? (35)

SC: Yeah.

L: We set our children up indirectly. Do a statistical on Father's Day, and how many fights you have with the kids for Father's Day because the kid that has a father is saying what he did with his father, and the kid that doesn't is pissed off because he doesn't have, so he jumps on that child that has one. I dare you come in here

essential to success in school, job interviews, etc. and that are so often overlooked. All the little things he mentions, from hygiene to eating with a fork and knife, to how to order from a menu, are all details that make a huge difference. I think this may be one of the most underrated aspects in success, the how-to skills that are necessary to navigate middle-class society in a successful way.

(35) I was caught off-guard by Lamar's comment about my son. I had brought him to Homewood to a father's event where 99% of all families were black, and he had had a blast from the moment that he stepped in, playing with all the other kids and running around like he was at school back home. I had thought nothing of it until Lamar brought it up. He would mention this a couple of times more before I left. How impressed he had been by the confidence shown by my son, how much he wanted that for every

talking about what you all did. And you think that happens? It happens more frequently than you think.

SC: Yeah. I'm sure..

L: You understand what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

L: So now you get into the bullying. See, they went to cyber stuff. And see, when they had me teaching this cyber bullying, I don't still understand it because bullying was physical to me.

SC: Uh-huh.

L: You understand what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah.

L: Me, I'm smart enough and intelligent, and I'll turn the damn computer off. You know what I mean?

SC: Uh-huh.

L: They're so computerized that words... Remember, there used to be a saying sticks and stone? You remember that saying?

SC: Yeah, sure.

L: What is there ain't going to hurt me. You know what's going to hurt me? It was when that bully punched you upside your head. That was physical. You're killing yourself over words now. That's crazy, you know what I mean? I was never a bully but I didn't get bullied on. I've seen kids get bully. I fought the bullies. You see, I always had a goofy standard with it, you know what I mean?

SC: Yeah.

other kid in Homewood.

L: It got old, you know what I mean? Well, it might be funny the first time, you know what I mean, but it gets old. You keep doing it, it's old. You know what I mean? Man, why don't you leave him alone, would you? All right. You know. I didn't care if I won or lost. So you better leave him alone. You see what I'm saying?

SC: Yeah.

L: So we got to structure things properly... it's -- they're felons in these areas, they're felons because the guys don't have the confidence in being a man. You put a man on the good suit, and watch his confidence grow up... What I think. Because I've learned this hard knocks. I'm still in the trench of shame. I'm still learning. Do you understand what I'm saying? I learn every day. But your -- we're in the trenches; you're still in the evolving point of this fatherhood stuff Shane. Understand that you're not far from a founding father, you know what I mean? (36)

SC: Yeah.

L: We founded this stuff. But you guys got to take this over. There's just too much work that needs to be done. It's just too much. You understand?

SC: Yeah. Absolutely.

L: You see the confidence in your son flipping that coin that day.

SC: Yeah.

L: I mean, come on. That's -- you see? You see him as his dad. It's the confidence that he had moving around, talking to other

(36) I was again caught off guard here by his comment that I wasn't far from a "founding father." It was an interesting moment, a reminder of how long I had spent attending meetings and events, and participating. It was also strange. Outside of the interview it would have sounded OK, but it sounded strange because the context was different. I wasn't doing this for the group, at least not directly, but to complete a requirement for my dissertation. The two hats I was wearing made it strange because I wasn't able to completely own his comment. Here I was a researcher, a little bit of a father, but very little "founding father."



adults.

SC: Yeah.

L: Other children. I watch everything.

SC: Yeah. He is a little confident -- confident fellow.

L: The confidence that he has, shouldn't every young man have that confidence? Wouldn't you like that for every child?  
(37)

SC: Absolutely.

L: I guarantee you, it would stop the violence because you would be confident in being you. We got to teach these men self before we teach them anything. Because if we can't teach them who they are, you can't teach them nothing. And this is what these programs is about; trying to teach you self. If we teach our fathers self and confidence in them, then they'll be better fathers. So, to be a good father, you've got to truly know who you are to be a good father. So, if you ask me, out of everything that we're saying, again, what makes a better father or what makes a father is learning self. That's that answer. And see, this discussion, you get the chance to go and then bring it all back and then bring it in. Because I can't do no programs, I can't do nothing, you can't teach me nothing if I'm not confident in me. Period. Am I right?

SC: Yeah. Absolutely.

L: So it just goes to that. So, all this time, not only was -- are we teaching, we're still creating self, you know what I mean?

SC: Uh-hmm.

(37) This was the second time he mentioned my son. I realized he had been observing him extendedly the week before. I obviously felt proud, but there was also a strange feeling. I know my son will grow with the confidence to know that if he tries, he will succeed. Everything is there for him to succeed. That is not the case with many of the other children at that event. The future for them grimmer simply because of where they live and the color of their skin.

L: The ability to cohabitate, to be able -- the experience that you're giving your son right now is going to last him a lifetime, because he'll be able -- he'll be comfortable being around Spanish people, black people, white people, all type of people because you see him mingling.

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: If you keep mingling him like that -- my mom used to take us to the council house that's why I'm a good person with children and people.

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: It was embedded into me that -- I mean, and they were retarded children but they love me. They love me. When I would go camping, my mom was like one of the workers and they -- you'd have to go camping, you'll have to do different things like that, they love seeing me come there. You see what I mean?

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: So it built me up as a kid of what I do now. So we look back at some of the things that we did or the influences that we have back then that show you why what you're doing, why you are the way you are now. And I love it. I've always been a communicator. I've always been one that was good with words, I've always been one that was good with people. You can't do this type of stuff if you're not a people person who wants to -- they are already frustrated, they're frustrated. So you come at them frustrated and you run in something, what do you think is going to happen? Well, we got to stand still. But you have to be very versatile. Sometime you have to be that way, and then sometimes you pull back. You have to --

you have to be -- you have to know you. Again, it goes back to self. Self is the key to everything in order to be a good mother, a good father, you have to know who you are. You can't teach no one nothing if you don't know who you are. I mean, you can try with confidence level because a kid see right through you. You ever remember that kid moves when you're hurting and you don't want to tell him something sometimes and he comes up and ask you, daddy, what's wrong? And you might play, you know, oh, nothing, son. But he could see it on your face.

SC: Yes.

L: He knows. Who do you think you're fooling? You're fooling yourself. Because -- and that's the teaching, that's the closeness, that's the mark, that's the confidence that he or she feels to be able to say that to you because they're confident and you adapt.

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: And they get confidence in themselves by seeing the confidence in you. You see what I mean?

SC: Yeah.

L: You got your little president running around there. I was thinking about him. I would tell him -- where I work at, I was telling my boss about him, and I say, he was just so confident, he was flicking me. He can't catch it yet but he was flicking me. (38)

SC: No, he's something else. He's something else.

L: But see, you're teaching him self. So when a person ask the question to you,

(38) "You got your little president running around there" My son had approached him in the event, flicking a coin in the air and asking him to pick heads or tails... It was a cute moment, this little white kid approaching this big black man and asking him, almost challenging him, to pick correctly "heads or tails." I realize that that was the moment that Lamar stayed with, what he was talking about when he was speaking of confidence.

unless you just want to do conversation, you know what I mean? What makes a good father is me knowing how I am, self. I don't know if you -- I don't know if they're going to understand that answer I just gave, but you know what I'm saying.

SC: No, absolutely.

L: This is self. You would probably have to be here to see it, you know what I mean? This is self. This is not anything that, you know, again, I've been to jail, I've been -- I mean, for this moving, you know what I mean? I've had my child kidnap off of me I have the articles in there. You understand what I'm saying? So, it has to be given to -- it has to be something greater than just me. Because a lot of times, I would get frustrated, you know what I mean? At the system, at what they say I am. I hated the fact that they locked everybody together as they did -- they did, and that's not true. Again, you think these kids would get these Air Jordan tennis shoes with their welfare checks? You know, there's some fathers out there doing it. And then there's a lot of fathers out there that don't want to go through that stuff because they don't understand the system and they feel, well, every time you -- it's a punishment. You see what I mean? (39) (40)

SC: Yeah.

L: So they're defensive about that. I don't know, you ain't telling me what to do. I'm taking care of my child because she ain't telling you that. No. It's not like that. So that's one of the statistics about being a black father and a black mother. All of us who are not bad. And the fact is, they do take care of them and did some time... My story. They had to be on welfare in order for them to have benefits, you know.

(39) "This is self" Lamar used self to mean a constellation of things involving primarily confidence and self-esteem, lack of fear, etc. It makes me think of again how important is eye contact in a neighborhood like mine, yet how dangerous it can be in a place like Homewood. That difference is a problem when in order to get a job you have to have good eye contact. Teaching self, I would think, would involve also good eye contact...

(40) Lamar points here to the unfairness of the stereotypes about families of welfare, supposedly buying Air Jordans over needed things (food, school books, etc.). I am reminded here of bell hooks' (2000) quote: "Once the poor can be represented as totally corrupt, as being always and only morally bankrupt, it is possible for those with class privilege to eschew any responsibility for poverty and the suffering it generates." (p. 68)

Hospitalization. Because the jobs that I was working at the time didn't have it. So what was I suppose to do? You ain't want to see your baby without no benefits. And you might work the job because you have to work the job.

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: But what if the baby needs to go to the hospital? What are you going to do? These are the life situations that I face in here, out there, but knowing how to roll with the system.

SC: So you have to be -- you have to have a mother in welfare and you work and be able to pass money under the table in order to do something that brings...

L: Yes.

SC: ... income?

L: Yes. Yes. And if you was to say that on the news and have people calling about that, you'd get a billion calls in because that's how it is. And they'll put you -- and they incarcerate you and you're still doing. See, a lot of fathers are pissed off at the fact, I'm bound this jail and I've just bought that baby a Wii Station or a PlayStation or, you know what I mean? And she's mad at me because I won't give her no money to probably get her nails done or her hair done. I got another woman. Do you understand what I'm saying? (41)

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: But I'm still taking care of it. "I know how to get his ass. I'm going to take him down family division." Then from there, the welfares system makes them sue you. You know what I mean?

(41) Lamar puts it all in terms that trivialize, I think, the struggles of mothers and makes it seem as if buying a kid a Playstation is comparable to the daily efforts involved in raising a child. It is interesting in a way because he falls in the trap of the stereotype he just refuted. It makes people on welfare sound capricious and spoiled. Mothers who take fathers to family Division so as to be able to do their nails. Fathers who buy Wii's and think that is enough.

SC: Yeah.

L: So you're doing and you're getting penalized. So it's a threatening system because they don't care. And then when you say, oh, you know, your honor, I've been doing this, I've been doing this and I've been paying for this and then the other, that's what you're supposed to do. But why the hell am I here? You see what I'm saying?

SC: Uh-hmm.

L: That's not cool (alarm goes off outside) Is that my car? Do you see what I'm saying, Shane?

SC: Yeah.

L: So, you're looking at black men frustrated because I'm doing and then because I won't do what she wants me to do. She could take me to a system, that I already know that I've had, that you're telling me I'm a deadbeat dad, and I'm confident about being a father. You couldn't talk to me that way, you know what I mean? How are you telling me what I am? So, it puts you in odds with the system. So now you're telling your boys what happen to you and they said -- now, neither of them said they don't want to go. They don't want to go down to no system that is not going to give them no respect. How about calculating that stuff? You say, OK, well, did he do this? Did he buy that? Did he do this? Yes. Yeah, he did. I don't care what the, you know, he's supporting, no. You still got to pay a little bit more -- probably less a month, do you know what I mean? And still keep doing what you're doing. How about patting that man on his back and saying, yeah, OK, you know what I mean? But you want

everything to calculate you to system so that you could track it. Then, once you could track it like that, look what happens. They going to cut all her benefits now because you received a funding...It's a double edge sword. You know what I mean? So they figured it, you're buying all these stuff for the kid and her, what she needs the benefits for? Now here's the thing, you ain't got benefits. She needs the shots, right, every year for school right? You think you could pay for that school? You know how much my medicine for cancer is, \$1,500 a bottle. If it wasn't for the Mario Lemiux fund, I'd be dead. You know what I'm saying? and that is -- and this is what they are saying to a lot -- I mean a lot of us is poor. We can't pay for that stuff, so it's a death sentence because you can't pay for the medication, you ain't got no health coverage so they die, period. So it's just about going back to you have to build a strong foundation. You have to stand on your own in order to hold them.  
(42)

SC: That's a massive -- I mean the whole picture that you painted from the beginning is a massive battle...

L: Yes.

SC: that involves so many fronts...

L: Yes.

SC: And that because this begins with responsible fatherhood I'm always going back to -- to this. And ultimately [inaudible] [1:32:01] full circle almost come back to the same thing, but there is something you told me before I even started to record on how you are father... That you are a father of 35, but you fathered five children. And that gives me a clue that for you father is not biology, am

(42) I was shocked although not surprised when Lamar mentioned that his medicine for Cancer was 1500 dollars a month. How can they expect anyone in this community (or in many others more privileged than this one) to pay for something like that? For an instant I understood... I got where he was in life. A medicine bottle away from death, and how life must be seen with that lens...

I right?

L: That's right. Being a father is not the person -- just because you can make a baby, don't make you a father. I'm a father to many, I'm also a father to my nephews, my nieces... that didn't have any father. So when the law had to be put down, guess where they brought them at, they brought them to me. You see what I mean? Then I'm a father to a lot of other children that never had role models, you know what I mean that -- that just came to me and just bonded with me because of who I am and what I do, you know what I mean? So you're not just a father to your child, you're a father to all the children that surround you when we are doing events. Now you understand? Now you -- you're catching my drift— because we're proud to be, most guys can't walk the way we walk because I would get upset with you if you didn't discipline my child, if they were doing something wrong and we're fathers, it takes a village. See they divided the village...is single parent this, is single parent that, how come they don't preach holicity anymore? They don't preach it anymore. Everything is geared towards single parents, mainly the moms. Do you see what I'm saying? So they invest in your house being broken up. Is that part of division? A little bit of that edumacation they gave me, and -- it goes back. You know what I'm saying? So they are preaching this on the TV, they're preaching all this crazy stuff on the TV and the children are attracted to that thing. When I was coming up they didn't show nothing up over the knees on a woman, now you see it all. Do you understand what I'm saying? They influence. That is property kills somebody, I say what records? Music always had a big influence on society from Elvis Presley to Beetles, you know what I mean? Each different

(43) Lamar endorses the view of social fatherhood, but he is also quite conservative in his values. It was tough waters for me to navigate empathetically... Feeling close to him on some fronts and then, for example, when he speaks of same sex marriage, or of single mothers, as below, feeling so distant.

"Everything is geared towards single mothers." I know what he is trying to point to, but there is a point to it... Everything is geared to single mother because mothers are more often than not (and the numbers don't lie here) being left to raise children on their own...



and each of these different phenomena was preached as hell music at the time... Remember when rock and roll was – it was you couldn't preach it. So in order for us to take back the communities and be able to teach like we have to, we have to have the kids and vision on us is like they are on this TV. And the practices are what we do proper, we need to walk over these young men that don't have men to walk them over into manhood. Why shouldn't we? You know what I mean? So we have to step -- our job is not done, not by long shot. So many avenues and things that we have to address and nowadays is not just the black community because the black and white community has mixed, is a people problem now, because these young ones don't care about color. When you are dealing with a generation and the laws that dealt with color, do you see the problem? You got all this new...hey, listen, they don't care about color. You -- you get -- you walk, I've never seen so many white people at Homewood or the Hill in my life. [laughter] it's...walking down the street, never happen before it wouldn't happen in my era. You would have to had a police escort you to walk your butt down here, you know what I'm saying? So things have changed. So the parenting has to change, it's a different battle. You are not in the battle -- you were -- I mean I had to educate my way to the battle over you guys off because I had to start something. So I have to be open to a lot of the different ways and values of different situations of -- even without fathers I was on reservations. It's different laws in these reservations but it's the primary thing that you have to teach self to the Indian father in order for him to teach it, you know what I mean? It all goes to self. Being a father is universal, but we don't get the same play that the internet does in order for us to put those teachings down. One of the

(44) Lamar had stated before we started recording that I had courage to have come down to Homewood, pointing out clearly how unusual it was to see somebody with my skin color in the neighborhood... Here he points out how race is becoming less of an issue, how somebody like me can come during the day to Homewood whereas some years ago I would have needed a police escort. I never on that day felt threatened there, but I was very aware walking to and from my car, and driving in and out of the neighborhood, that I was out of place.

things -- I don't mean to cause -- one of the things that we -- you had touch on is about when you are reading. Isn't it just amazing that -- that things you are not reading, you are not reading about the young entrepreneur black guys that are in these areas? They are going positive. You're readings about the bad things that occur with fathers, the bad things that occur with black males. The media has a lot to do with it because you see that on section on praising the young guys and the young females in each area that are doing positive as young entrepreneurs because you won't do that, why? So you get the young entrepreneur person that you know what I mean might need a little help because the business is getting ready to fall. If he had some publication he can get some help, you know what I'm saying when I'm saying? So now you get him, he's on the side now [laughter] so that's it. Well I did have a business but no effect so now I'm doing this. Like the people coming to my shop, don't you think if they got the pro application as well as they get... Oh I'll just put it as -- put it as much as the killings you do for the positive stuff in here, doing equal. I guarantee you might have problems out on this, there's a guy that is an entrepreneur because his going to be teaching the entrepreneurship to other people, you know what I mean? And he is going to be -- and he or she is going to be doing what they need to do because you're always high like these killings. When another killing in black areas, this guy was suspected okay and I guess so that when you wake up in the morning, if you don't hear about the killing you have -- you wonder if you watch the news, you know what I mean? So I listen to you to what you were saying about not been saying that to them on TV, the news, and everything before had why don't you -- why not? And they still

(45) Lamar highlights here the contrast between what the news continuously highlights about communities like Homewood (murders, arrests, etc.), and the attempts to improve the area, which rarely make it to the news. Of course, good stories seldom make it to the news, but it is even stranger that they do from neighborhoods like Homewood. Could things change if news outlets dedicated some of their time to good news stories coming from impoverished areas? If we buy Lamar's idea of self esteem, then yes, something like a regular short segment on TV that showed a hopeful view of the neighborhood would likely be helpful.

haven't done it. Why? Because they are feeding the penitentiary, that's where it's at. There is no money in me saying that John Steven is now doing a good job and has a nice little auto body place that you might want to go to that is in the Homewood area on the Hill district area that you know what I mean, that he does good work. Now you want to hear about John Smith killing somebody or shooting somebody that is not -- that's not make good news to me, you know what I mean? (43)(44)(45)

SC: But it sells.

L: But it sells. See I worry about the young father that got killed now that he -- that he has four kids that now he doesn't have a direction. Now this kid is hostile, father's day. When your kid is coming around saying "my dad and I went into a baseball game" and my dad just got killed. You see the tension? It's going to be a problem, because they are not addressing those kids. They are not addressing them. You see there's -- there's a lot that we have to do. There's a lot that has to take place. That all of we normally -- listen this going to take us will pass away, you guys will pass away this will take the science to continue this fight and to put the band-aids on the wounds that has been perpetrated through the years, you see what I mean? Right now we aren't covered -- we're doing good -- we're doing good, you know what I mean?

SC: Good enough?

L: Is -- is never going to be enough until you get that perfect father. You can't get the one that's perfect to Jesus Christ, you can't look for that. That's what makes us human beings, to have flaws. If everybody was the same, you know what I mean? I

don't think it would be, you know what I mean? If everybody is the same, then I don't think it would be right. I mean I don't know what to say to that..

SC: I have maybe a last thing and you haven't touched on this... it usually comes out in -- when you look at programs and things like this... It is marriage and the importance of marriage. And for some groups, certainly NFI is big on this but there are other groups more or less that push marriage has one of the key to -- keys things for responsible father that is marriage and not outside of marriage, cohabitation, separation. I wanted you to get your -- your take on that... on marriage and responsible father and how you feel about it.

L: Well, I just did it. I just didn't say marriage but they are always preaching separate, single parent this and single parent that. When I say holicity it is marriage, you know what I mean? A bond, you know what I mean? But it doesn't take a bond to be a father or a mother, it takes knowing self for both of you in order for you to be able to teach. It has to go back to a man and a woman, it has to go back to marriage, it has to -- it has to go because that is the foundation. It has to go back to that I mean I'm -- see I'm thrown off as a father that they don't push the marriage fact but they give -- they give this gay stuff more publicity than they give fatherhood. (46)

SC: What do you mean, the... gay marriage?

L: Yes -- yes. You understand what I'm saying? One of the issues is that, I believe that they can't be good parents because of simple fact of what you put the children through. The children go through a lot of

(46) Lamar looked at me like I hadn't been listening. Of course I had not realized that everytime he was speaking about "holicity" he was speaking about marriage. In any case, his statement against gay marriage and angry follow-up implying gay couples put kids through their "bullcrap" caught me off-guard. I was unsure how to respond to it so I went back to marriage. After I left his house I wondered if I shouldn't have explored the topic any further...

stuff like teasing and different things anyway, and then they have to go through your bull crap you know what I'm saying? Marriages between a man a woman and that's how it should be in order for things to get a little bit better I think that it could, but you have to have the right mother and right father that's together. You just can't have a person coming together under that institution and they are not meant for each other, if you understand what I'm saying?

SC: So you said you can be a responsible father outside of marriage, and you certainly provided the best example yourself, obviously outside of marriage.

L: Yes.

SC: But the foundation is marriage.

L: Yes.

SC: And it should happen through marriage, is that the idea?

L: Yes. But it shouldn't waiver if you're not you should -- you -- you should again go with what's in the best interest of the child whether you're married or you're not. It shouldn't take off your ability to be a father. If you're a father, you will be a father forever. You may not be married forever, but it's nice to have that unity because you want to teach that structure, that structure, that foundation. See when I was coming up, we had like great, great grand and them had a 88<sup>th</sup> reunion — we don't have these type of things no more because people don't get married anymore, you understand what I'm saying? (47)

SC: Sure.

L: So society doesn't give these -- these kids don't get a chance to see a couple that

(47) Lamar backpedaled here, and clarified his position to a less drastic one. Marriage is an important structure but not essential to responsible fatherhood. What is important is best interest of the child. Yet I wondered, isn't the best interest of the child what is often argued when custody is granted to mothers? Clearly Lamar is arguing that the best interest of the child is loving parents that stay together, but what if that is not possible?

was together for 50, 60 years, you know what I mean? So you got to marry the right person, 50, 60 year...figure out how many minutes and seconds you was together then, that's a lifetime, you know what I mean? And that's what I say counseling to a couple, on how long you have been together? You've been together ten years, well how many minutes is that? You gave that much time to this person?

SC: That is if couples have been married or even if they are not married.

L: Right. Right. It's the time that you're spending... again time, what does the kid need? Time. A relationship needs time. A wine ain't good until it ages. Time. Am I right? So this time thing is -- is a great -- is a great thing, but we got to get back to marriage as a holistic thing but if you can't be married then you have to be -- you had to know -- you had to be a good person yourself you know what I mean, to want to be that father. Everybody don't want to be a father. Ain't nobody said it was easy, but they make it work -- worse. The system makes it worse, you know what I mean? I mean come on, why not be like you're a room supply everybody with a job or you know what I mean? And they usually get somebody for training. If you're going to be a doctor then you could be a tradesman. If you're not going to be this then you can be that, you know what I mean? We will fit you to what you would do something. And we will pay for your school. We will pay for this and then the other. We want to make sure that you're working and doing something.

Why not? I don't -- I see a lot of the problems are financial. And it makes me mad on this TV, when you got this guy, Cowell... (48)

(48) This was a funny moment in the interview that I did not quite

SC: You mentioned that the other day...

L: Yeah. Now he is -- now the last time I see him again -- again his telling, he said, "being a parent is not financial". Yeah, but you know the courts don't understand that. And as many times as I've sat up there and said, "You know you're not a father because you..." "Your honor, being a father is not financial" "Where is the money?" See it's financial to you! That's what makes me frustrated because you can put me in jail because I don't have money but you get money from my body behind the jail but I don't have money. Wait a minute, you want to take my children, let's -- let's get this right. We have a system that will take your children and pay a foster family to raise your children and your issue is you don't have money. If a light don't go off in your head about that, does that make sense to you? Just think about it. They pay these foster families the same amount of money, to take care of your child but your issue is financial. (49)

SC: So the decision made on why you can't take care of your child is because you don't have the money to take care of your child.

L: Right.

SC: And then they decide they're going to give the money to take care of your child to somebody who's going to take care of the child because now they have the money...

L: It's crazy! Now when you speak that to the system they think you're crazy. You know what I see, you're keeping this family together, making it better for them allot that doggone money so that she can do the necessary things she needs to do or he needs to do on them as a family to take

understand then. I thought Lamar had mentioned Simon Cowell, but he clearly meant somebody different, although he never noticed that I did not know who he was talking about. In any case, Lamar highlights the contradiction inherent to a system that emphasizes through court that fatherhood is, above all, being able to be a provider, yet promotes also the idea of presence as key for development.

(49) I was surprised to hear this, but have been unable to confirm if it is true... That children may be removed from a home because of financial problems while giving a foster family money to provide for that same child...

care of their children. You want to pay somebody else to take care of... what if their views and values are not the same as mine? And they -- something is wrong with that picture to me. It might not -- tell me if you think I'm crazy on this now.

SC: No, no.

L: I mean it used to be a song that say, "Things can make you go hum", remember that? That will make you go, wow! Now that's probably the first time you heard that, am I right?

SC: Yeah, it is the first time.

L: You should be like, "My goodness he's right!"

SC: Yeah, and it is.

L: It is mind blowing. So if you haven't -- so you go to a little hut with your son and you can't do the things that you're doing now because it is financial. Why would they give you something to me and then pay me to take care of your son and now you got to ask me permission to see your kid. That would piss you off! So now you are hostile to the system. Isn't that you want it -- you're a lot -- you are at these hearings right? And they said, "Okay, we'll allot \$2500 for them to take care of the child for a month." You say, whoa! You don't have that money, taking your own child. We need to assist you in this because of the financial or we will assist you until you get this training.

SC: So the system is an enforcer that is not a -- is not designed to help parents succeed.

L: It's not. It's not designed to help because anytime that the system is making

(50) My face must have shown that I was in shock. I cannot still believe that this is true, as it doesn't make any sense. If the determination to take a child from a home is based on financial difficulty and then a foster home is getting money for raising that child, that would be idiotic. Because of it, I am still skeptical about it.

(51) Lamar's point here --that the system should not, cannot make money



financial -- financial gain on you, how's it fair? It can't be fair. The way to do fair is the way I just explained it. But don't you think that you will have a lot of better fathers, better mothers? So this goes mothers and fathers, you know what I mean? Instead of taking the children away from you totally because your house is messed up, how about putting them with family paying you to learn how to clean your house. What if I was raised with clutter? I don't see nothing wrong with it, you know what I mean? I'm saying if that's how I was raised. So these things that -- that -- that society can do to make better men and the system is never been on the man side in the first place, this is a Commonwealth state. So if you think you want to have -- see they don't care about nothing but the females and the babies. Once you get over the age 18 as a male, you're in trouble [laughter] that's what happens because this is a Commonwealth state. So if the laws will deal for women, men were in the steel mills or whatever. And they never change because the mother was the primary caretaker and the father or the male was the breadwinner. Things have changed so much, to the mothers going to whatever they do this that and the other you know what I mean? And what happens is that you went from discriminating against females, from discriminating against males. It doesn't make sense -- it doesn't make sense. It needs to go to the middle. It needs to hit to the middle because if it doesn't hit to the middle, you'll never going to have a good solution to this. There is nothing good in incarcerating a young father when he doesn't have a record... you create a criminal from because once he gets that record, it follows him. Now he can't get a job. Now they check to see if he got good credit just to get a job. So you're dooming this young father's to be now by

of the families that go through family court-- is an obvious one, but to me it extends to any type of public service... The moment something like healthcare, for example, is based on profit, then the whole system ends up becoming corrupt.

(52) Unfortunately statements like "they don't care nothing but the females and the babies" immediately would break the momentary spell Lamar had put me in. His historical explanation and the difficulties of the system to adapt to what is a different society than it was when the steelmills where in town, would make sense were it not for the incredible difference in the presence of single fathers vs single mothers. Lamar should know this, I thought, as he was raised by a single mother.

incarcerating them and putting that on his record, you see what I'm saying? So how do you think they're supposed to act? Because once they leave that jail, they got that on their record and now the employers can look it up in Google machine and pull it up. Oh, I don't want have you as bad character, he doesn't pay his child support. What if that is just not the case. Now if you give me a job I can pay my child support, but They don't look it like that. They look at it that you got a strike, but you ain't looking at the fact that it's financial. I need a job in order to pay... Now then you have it where they check to see if you owe anybody anything. What if you lost your job and you do owe some things, but now they don't want to hire you because you have bills. So how's that helping you? It's not. If your credit is bad, the way to get to your credit good is to have a job, right? But they won't hire you because you fell the club check. See they think they slick, what they're doing, they think that the people are dumb. This is why the people are hostile at the system because we already know the game that you're playing, is the game that you're playing. You're doing any in everything... You said that you're helping me but you're doing any in everything to hinder me from advancement. (51) (52)(53)

So you have to look at it -- see this is like -- I look at things in a different way to come to the way that I need to help, you know what I mean? So I cover a lot of things because I've been through a hell of a lot. I take the things that I've been through. I take some of the things that I know through statistics. I take a lot of the different things, you know what I mean? And I put it together, then I can roll with it because what I'm saying is real. You know what I mean? We are talking about

(53) Again, this reminded me of Michelle Alexander's book "The New Jim Crow." The prison complex is a de facto apartheid, where being branded as a felon means you do not get to participate in society again. Since black men are a great majority of the incarcerated population, a new Jim Crow gets established...

positive role models When you just going to take positive role model know out of the the equation...when you take them out of the equation so much happens to our children. Especially the females... When they have positive male role models that they are less likely to get raped. They more likely to complete school. They more likely to -- you know what I mean? Go on to have careers.

SC: So fathers are necessary.

L: It very, very necessary. It's like you trying to make soup and you forget the ingredient.

SC: And the role that fathers play is different than the role the mother plays?

L: Extremely. I hate it when the females says, "I'm the father." I hate it when the men says it, but I can, I can deal with the men saying "I'm the mother," I can't deal with the mother aspect of it. I don't want to be a female at all. You understand what I'm saying? The hardest job in the world was being a single parent. I'm not a female. There is nothing I do female. I do not understand being a female, you understand? And I ain't going to confess to any of that other stuff. And about that bullcrap about don't put money together to pay you to talk about you. To commit what your female foot, I'm a man! How do you expect me to be a father, but you're telling me to be attach with my female side. I ain't got no female side! Period. You guys get off with that. And I talked to scholars, we debate this and we debate this and they have not got me yet [laughter] because it's -- it's a ludicrous -- it's ludicrous. Now if she goes around saying that she is connected to her male side you are going to be calling her a dyke and all that...Am I right? Come on! (54)

(54) Lamar was sincere here and did not even try to hide his antagonism towards women. I felt it was a revealing moment in the force and passion with which it came through. It was patriarchy at its best, arguing for essential difference at its core: "there is nothing I do that is female, I do not understand being a female" I continue to find the word female so disagreeable and demeaning, like one was speaking of animals, not human beings. Men have used similar arguments in the past about race, arguing that there is nothing in "whites" that is "black," as if preserving purity would guarantee difference. I was surprised to hear Lamar be so drastic,

SC: Do you see it the other way also around like the mother is also necessarily and the mother is not a father?

L: I tell them. There's nothing you can do how you would a man period, period. We don't think the same. You ever have a plan together as a man when you think you're going to do a proposal and stuff and then you ran it pass a female and she'll say maybe it's for the better. But you didn't think about it because it not where you are tunneled to go. Now when she tells you, and "Oh, okay I can incorporate that", you know what I mean? But for the most part she does the same thing, we do not think the same. We are different beings.

SC: But both necessary in your view?

L: Yes.

SC: The whole holistic view?

L: Yes.

SC: They're both necessary.

L: I got to go respect her fact to being a woman and she has to respect my fact as being a man. You understand what I'm saying? I have to know that she is my mate and that she has different thoughts on things. We come together to communicate. Communication is the key to all of it. If you don't have good communication in your marriage, your relationship ain't going to work. If I can't talk to you, it's a done deal. You see what I mean?

SC: Yeah, absolutely and in saying that you're completely different, are the roles in raising a child completely different too or not?

almost angry about having to admit to a metaphoric "female" side. He had a daughter that he loved, yet there was clearly a part of him that despised women...

L: I would say to an extent because a male listen. I raised my daughter. She's very beautiful, very sweet. But she has that hard side of her for being around a man because I can't do that dainty, it's not in my vocabulary, you understand what I'm saying? Even though I was telling her how to be a woman, I can't show her how to be a woman. Women had to show her how to do that curtsy, that bending of the hand, that blinking of the eyes, that switching, you know I mean like walk. What do I look like trying to teach that? [Laughter] You know what I mean? I don't even go in that side of the world, right? [Laughter] See, you're laughing at me. I'm serious. And this is what I say to the scholars. You have lost your mind. I ain't going over there. Men are from Mars and women from Pluto. Whatever... It is true. It's true. That's what makes us compatible. You understand? (55)

SC: Yeah.

L: The difference that we have as man and woman, the conversation that we can have as man and woman, there is a difference. You see what I'm saying? The man is driven in his mind as a protector, is weeded in us before we were even born. Period. Either you the alpha, omega male or you're not, you're just subordinate. You know what I mean? The head wolf is making all the love. The subordinate get to watch [Laughter]. I'm a head wolf. [Laughter] You're going to have problems because you ain't the head wolf, I'm going to be on top of you all the time. It's in our nature, and what happens is you get a dominant female now with a less dominant male or you get a dominant male with a less dominant female where if you check out nature, only the two strong ones run the pack. Now, we got this matchmaking

(55) This may be one of the more interesting arguments posed, showing the ideological problems Lamar runs into when trying to explain his position on gender. Although Lamar has argued that women and men are essentially different, here he states his daughter has a hard side to her because she never had a mother to learn how to be a woman from. This, of course, implies gender behavior is learnt, which contradicts his earlier arguments. Lamar's behavior here again showed some traces of male chauvinism, associating women with "prissy" behaviors and stereotypical sexualized behavior. Upon seeing his gestures, I laughed... he suddenly looked like a man in drag, performing the feminine stereotype.

(56) I felt patriarchy was completely uncovered here. The man is the protector, the alpha, the wolf. Women are the dominated, the ones that get mounted... It was a bizarre moment that became even more bizarre when Lamar started arguing for only the strong to "mate" with the strong, stating part of the problem is too many weak are breeding in society. Suddenly we had gone from social justice to eugenics, and I had a black man in front of me in Homewood arguing for selective breeding to solve the problems of the neighborhood... I was floored.

with queens. [Laughter] You know what I mean? You see it. How many times you like? Is she behaved? You ever do that? Seriously and you can see it even if they go vice versa. He's with her? You know what I mean? It's just too much of it. It's just too much of it. And you're not breeding the strong. There are so many weak people out here, this time out generation, this nonworking generation. You see what's going on? You see the effects of fathers not being inside the households. You see it. And all this stuff that's going on and ain't doing that but making the laws to put you in jail even more just trying to say that you can do it so you don't have to think about it. That's why it's very good for us to have discussions. When I'm sitting and talking to this people that make these laws or these scholars and stuff. They love talking to me because I bring in a different line on things. You know what I mean? I never thought about it like that Mr. L. [Laughter]. You know what I mean? And those are the discussions. And then again, we might be saying the same thing but it's not what you say is how you say it. I'm going to deliver it different from the way you're going to deliver it. You might sugarcoat a little bit. I ain't sugarcoating nothing. This is how it is and if you want to stop this, this is what needs to be done. I understand that this is not a quick solution. This has a long-term effect here. You understand? So my job or your job is still going on. I still have the same compassion though. You see what I'm saying? My children are older now, I can just jump out of this. If I jump out now, who's going to take it? No one. That's my fear. This should not die. Never. I haven't sold out to the government. I haven't sold out to, you know, letting people take my organization or run it the way they want to. We've been very

(57) Lamar goes back here to the idea of the missing father as the problem for “weakness” in the newer generations. But his argument is made from the point of view that it is the institutions that are keeping men away from households, that is, he is not saying men are not present because of their own doing, but because they are not allowed to be present... By this point I thought it was remarkable that at no point had he acknowledged directly that there are men that are not taking responsibility, that there is a problem with men having children but no participating in raising them...

effective poor. Trust me. You know what I mean? And the little moneys that I do make it, but when I help you, you helped. You ain't got to go [Indiscernible] [2:06:17.3]. People will get the generation program, me, Kevin, and Denise Simpson wrote that program. They stole it. The visitation and stuff like that, they stole that out from us. There's a lot of stuff they took out from us by sitting and meeting with these people and they're promissory thing, they take notes when they steal the stuff and put another different name and put it out. They already know what time it is down there. And they knew they had to deal with the flexibility of now becoming fathers and we were bitching about the fact that, you know, that we didn't have any rights now. You see what's going on. My son has from Thursday to Sunday, beautiful, unheard off, with his kid. From Thursday to Sunday, that's beautiful. There's was this one day, I go down and, you know what I mean, and they said L. D. who's your dad? It's L. D. Oh, okay. Because they already know that you know his dad's going to come down to make sure that this boy's going to see his kid. You know what I mean? So he got from Thursday to Sunday. I said won't you shut your mouth. You know what I mean, because I talk too much sometimes. They don't understand. The boy doesn't want to learn alone. You know what I mean. As much as I took him around, you would think... (56) (57)

SC: How old is he?

L: He is 24. You would think that they would want to further this. They're not into what we're into until they hit probably a certain level on age. Now, it used to be 25. It's when you got your donning. You know what I mean? But I think it might be 40. [Laughter] I'm serious. Man, it has a

lot of bricks out here man. A lot of bricks and when I call a person a brick and you'll hear some people say because they love my coins that I make up. You can't teach a brick nothing but to fall faster. You know how to make a brick fall faster? Throw it on the ground. This looked dumb. [Laughter] You hear me call, he's a brick. You know. My God. That's gone. But that's what we had. A lot of guys feel that way because the system is not holistically trying to help them. One thing is you got to get that mistake of Division out of the way. For the ones like us that got some education that they gave us, division means to divide. It does not mean anything but negativity. Your wordification is messed up. So, how do you change it?

SC: Family services....

L: You can call it what you want to now because too many people know it was called family division. We have to die out before that. [Laughter] But we're telling our children what is called. They might call it family court now, but we knew it as family division. You never did anything but divide my family or attempt it to divide my family. But I've always been a strong black male that didn't care about what you were saying or how you were going to do it because I was going to see my kids and my kids would tell you oh yeah he's kicking the door. You know what I mean? I'm coming to get my kids. Don't you tell me what I can't get and I go get my kids. You can't do that now. You know what I mean? But it's true and I wouldn't care if you were dealing with my children's mom as long as you didn't violate, You was all right. I've always been cool like this. The guy with their mom, he has been with their mom for I say 12 or 13 years. When we first met, he wanted to act out tough.

(58) I can think of few other worst naming efforts than that of Family Division. That the Family Division of Civil Court became just "family division" and went on to mean an institution that divides families for entire neighborhoods of Pittsburgh has to be one of the worst public relations linguistic disasters I have heard of...



Now, I said listen father I don't mind smashing you upside your head, but you need to act like you got some sense because these are my children. If they do anything to you, you can call me. I'll travel to whoop their butt. You know what I mean? But let's not be disrespectful. No playing any games and if you keep looking at me like that, we won't have a problem. You know what I mean? I said to him I set the rules. First time he called me I think when one of them was getting smart with him or something like that. I took care of it. It's always respect. You know what I mean? They get mad because I get along with their boyfriends. You know what I mean? I ain't got time for all that. You know what I mean? Because if you are there, you got to act like you got some sense in you. You don't act like you have no sense. I will come put you out. You know what I mean because you're not holistic for my children. See, that's the working relationship you must establish. It's all right if you move on baby girl. But we're still going to deal with these kids. You understand what I'm saying? These are our children. We're going to do what we got to do. It's all right if you move if you got someone. Hey, how you doing my man? It's nice to see a lot of people are not like that. You have to have that mindset. You understand? Because 95% of the jail is about sex, you know, incarceration, about man and woman's relationships. That's what that jail is about. So, we have to teach that it's all right to move on. You go and you still got to raise these here and as long as you respect me, I got you. I'll help you out. I've helped them out. You know what I mean? So, you know, he'll pull up right here and come in. Now, if they don't like it, [Laughter] but we're men and the first thing he'll tell you, I got respect for you, I mean he is just different. You know what

I mean? I got no problem with you; you know what I mean, unless you make one. If you don't make one, I'm cool. You know what I mean? I got you guys some sense because we won't deal raising these children with your mind. You know what I mean? And if you want to be a part of their life, you know, act like you get it right. Period. And that's how we have to be instead of, "man I'm going to kill you." I just have to tell you, this guy is calling my hotline because this woman's calling my hotline trying to figure out what to do with our sons. He doesn't know that she's calling me for the counseling and the different things. He pulls our number up off the internet so he calls my phone. And I answer "This is so and so" "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to do this and that and the other," you know what I mean. We don't know. So, I get his number tracked. I called him up. I said "listen, I don't know what your problem is or whatever you're doing. I said listen, you need to listen first. My name is Mr. L.. As you already know, I have a father's organization and it's not for me to give you information that your wife calls me for information and that's all I can give to you. It has nothing to do whether you were messing with her or anything, and that's it. I got to be a bad dude to be able to stick your wife from Pittsburgh to Virginia. You know [Laughter]. I said you need to stop with these calls brother and you need to understand the fact that of the matter is indirectly I've been in your corner even when you made this baby and brought the baby in the house and said the baby was a foster kid and then they found out it was yours. I said, listen, the reason why you're still there is because of a person like Mr. L.. That was wrong. You see what I'm saying? So that stopped all that. And I just I said you need to treat her like he was treating her when you first got

(59) His assertion that 95% of jail is about men and women relationships seems highly inaccurate, and goes against the idea that it is crimes like possession and attempt to distribute illegal substances that takes the cake.

her and that's what's wrong with relationships because once you get that person vice versa you'll stop treating that person like you treated them when you first got with her. You see what I mean? So that needs to stop. We need to start having more family places that we can go and then receive and have you and that significant other even if you're not together at an event with the children. You see what I mean?

SC: Yeah.

L: That builds strength. We got to teach them how to be men and order. There's too much drug dealing...al that stuff. Listen now, you cannot make a good man until you can make sure that he's going to be financially set to learn who he is. You see what I mean? Or he's going to be out here making this money. He's making this money. Castro already told you in the 60s he said listen I can't beat militarily, but you're a drug dependent nation. I'm sorry I like history. You know what I mean? But the reason why we got the killings and we got the lack of good fathers is because they don't know their history to be proud about themselves that's why you could take another life and kill a person for nothing. My question is you're dying for these streets? Mr. L. can go on in and say I own \*\*\*\* C. St. and show you the stuff. Now, which one of you own your own home? Which one are you dying for the street? Show me the deed on the street. No. They'll show you what's going on. They do some martial law stuff. Come down here. Ain't nothing like a tank rolling to your house like it happened in Afghanistan. Don't you get it twisted? You ain't seen nothing. They'll take a run on this household. With you in it. [Laughter] I'm serious. They ain't seen nothing and that's what's going to have to

(60) Lamar goes here to the lack of awareness of black civil rights history –I am assuming– as part of the reason why black gang members can kill each other. His claim that people are killing each other for streets that don't even belong to them is one I had heard from other group members, and that pointed to the absurdity of the fact, although of course

happen. It's going to have to be a state of martial law for a number to be able to take back the community and just get all the guns and the drugs out of the community and then set a precedent from there. Are you not going to do it? Because you have nothing in this community after you got rid of the heart of Pittsburgh, you replaced it with Wal-Mart. You took away a big human heart and you put this little pigeon's heart in my chest. Now, you think all the functions should roll well like it should. Some shit is going to shut down. You know what I mean? Maybe your arm ain't going to work. [Laughter] You got a little heart. You see what I'm saying? It's not pumping the blood to the community to supply the blood to the arteries and veins of the community. So, you took the steel mill away. Now, the last time before I got sick, I was on TV. I told them that they need to get some of this green technology stuff and put it into the black areas. How about putting the window shingles or the green technology plant here in Homewood? How about taking the door butt part of it and put it in Hill district. In order to stock a lot of this stuff then you got to put plants in different working areas for these people to make money and everybody ain't college material. Where do they get that everybody is college material? They're not or you wouldn't have trade unions and different things like that. Everybody's not college material. You got the green technology. You're going to be making the green windows and stuff like that. You're going to be making the doors to it. You're going to be making the roofs to it. If you put a plant in each area at each community, I guarantee you it will change that community. The value of property will be nice. You see what I'm saying. The living conditions, and if you have that plant, a store will come. And from that

people do not kill themselves over streets, they kill themselves over money, money that comes through one's ability to be in a corner selling drugs.

(61) This argument –placing green technology factories and plants in areas such as Homewood or Wilkinsburg, for example– is one that Van Jones has been making across the country for a long time. That any vision of social justice must be tied to the environment too, and that the rise of green technologies should be tied to impoverished areas as a social justice effort that kills two birds with one stone. The suggestion was

store, another store will come. The problem is you killed it. When you killed the steel mills, you killed the mom and pop stores. They had a lot of families that survived from pay check to pay check because they would give them credit. You know what I mean? And they will cash the check here. You know what I mean? And take out what you owe them and you didn't have to go to the bank. All is done. You know what I mean? The mom and pop drug store if you needed some antibiotics or you needed, you know, something for the kids or something right there and you didn't have the money, they give it to you until you got paid. People went back out and pay them. You know what I mean? It's gone. You can't go to Wal-Mart and ask them, well you know. I think I need this, oh they'll put you in jail. [Laughter] You can have it but we'll put you in jail. You know what I mean? So, you got to see the structure of what happened and if things they're not willing to do, I think it makes good sense to put the plants in the depressed areas. (60) (61)

SC: Absolutely.

L: And you build a better father. Because now, I can think about something else instead of that income part of where the money is coming and they did a better. It makes your job easy because I could teach you better if you're really worried about paying the rent or child supports coming up and you can't pay. You know what I mean. So, if your mind is set at ease.

SC: It goes back to the beginning to the time issue and having the time.

L: Yes. It's going to go back but it's just so much. You know what I mean? And it is like swirling. You know what I mean? Because I can talk for 10 years and

surprising, and a reminder of the paradox that Lamar was, capable of extremely progressive ideas while holding onto extremely reactionary values.

everything will be poignant. It's going to come back to the beginning. It's going to come back to self. It's going to come back to time. It's going to come back to building a better structure. So, if you put it all together, what you're doing is creating a mini me. You see what I'm saying? You're creating that little mini me whether it's male or female you're creating. She's moaning. You're moaning. She is supposed to teach the females. You're supposed to show the female what type of man that she needs to go after by modeling after you. You're teaching him how to be a boy, a man, to stand up for work, values, and different things like that and how to be a man. She is teaching how to the female. It comes together holistically as a whole person. That's my belief. (62)

SC: Yeah.

L: I'm kind of crazy sometimes. I hope I didn't bore you.

SC: No. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. You gave me much more than I expected.

L: And that's because again a founding father, like I told you before.

SC: OK. I'm going stop the recording here...

(62) This common sense idea of gender division and how men are needed to teach men and women how to treat a woman, etc. etc., was repeated by a lot of the fathers, and by now I had realized its power as an idea came from its simplicity and perfect fit, like a puzzle. Somehow, though, even here the lessons taught by a woman, clear in the case of girls seemed unclear in the case of boys, and quite secondary. What does a mother teach a boy under this vision? Not values, not work... Perhaps the type of woman (submissive, obedient) he needs to go after?

## **Appendix E: Sign-up Sheet Presentation Script**

Hello, my name is Shane S. Chaplin and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Psychology at Duquesne University. I am currently working on my dissertation with Duquesne University Psychology professor Dr. Constance Fischer, PhD. I am investigating black men's understandings of responsible fatherhood. Participation in this study requires that you allow me to interview you on your understanding of responsible fatherhood and your personal experiences as they relate to that understanding. The interview should take approximately 1 to 2 hours of your time. I will make every effort to accommodate everyone's needs in regards to time and location of the interview.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out the sign-up sheet and I will contact you over the next few days to determine the time and location for the interview. If you know of any other regular meeting attendees/volunteers not present today that may be interested in participating please provide them with my contact information available in the sign-up sheet. Thank you.

## Appendix F: Research Study Sign-up Sheet

PRIMARY RESEARCHER:  
[chaplins@duq.edu](mailto:chaplins@duq.edu), 412-551-9929.

Shane S. Chaplin, M.S.

STUDY TITLE:  
Fatherhood (RF) Narratives: Listening for the Trace of RF as Social Identity

Black Men's Responsible

NOTES:  
investigate black men's understandings of responsible fatherhood.

This research project seeks to

Participation in this study requires that you allow me to interview you on your understanding of responsible fatherhood and your experiences as they relate to that understanding.

The interview will take 1-2 hours of your time.

LOCATION:  
Interviews will take place at a site mutually agreed upon by you (participant) and I (researcher) prior to the interview. I will make every effort to accommodate your needs in regards to time and location of the interview.

|    | Name | Phone Number | Email | Best Times Available During the Week |
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| 1. |      |              |       |                                      |
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## **Appendix G: Informed Consent**



# DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**TITLE:** Black Men's Responsible Fatherhood (RF) Narratives: Listening for the Trace of RF as Social Identity

**INVESTIGATOR:** Shane S. Chaplin, MA  
330 McCully St., Pittsburgh, 15216,  
412-551-9929

**ADVISOR:** Constance T. Fischer, PhD  
Psychology Department  
412-396-5073

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology at Duquesne University

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate adult (18+ years old) black men's understandings of responsible fatherhood. Participation in this study requires that you allow me to interview you on your understanding of responsible fatherhood and your experiences as they relate to that understanding. The interviews will take 1-2 hours of your time, and be taped and transcribed.

This is the only request that will be made of you.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** This study will help us better understand how adult black men who have made responsible fatherhood an important part of their identity understand the term. A possible benefit to you is that in answering my questions you may deepen your understanding of what responsible fatherhood means to you, and how you have come to that understanding. There are no foreseen risks to this study greater than those encountered in everyday life.

**COMPENSATION:** You will not be compensated for your participation in this study, and participation will not require monetary costs on your part.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All identifying information from you or any third party mentioned during the interview will be omitted from the written accounts of the interviews. Pseudonyms for names, locations, etc. will be used in the transcripts for reading ease. Audio recordings and transcripts will be kept under password in the researcher's laptop hard drive until five

Duquesne University  
Institutional Review Board  
Protocol #11-21  
Approval Date: 02/21/2011  
Expiration Date: 02/21/2012

years from the completion of the study, after which they will be erased. All consent forms will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home until five years after the completion of the study, after which they will be shredded.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and you may request the destruction of your interview records with your withdrawal from this project.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Shane S. Chaplin, MA., at 412-551-9929, or Constance T. Fischer, PhD, Professor Psychology Department Duquesne University at 412-396-5073 or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412-396-6326.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Duquesne University  
Institutional Review Board  
Protocol #11-21  
Approval Date: 02/21/2011  
Expiration Date: 02/21/2012

## Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- I'd like you to speak about RF. What does RF mean to you as a black father? How did you come to that understanding?

**Theme Checklist** (with example of possible further probing question below):

- Working definition of a father implied? (Essence? Social Construction?)
  - “So a father to you is...” (if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to that understanding?”)
- What is the main implied/stated role of a father? (Nurturer? Provider? Protector? Role Model? Etc.)
  - “You stated (implied/said/mentioned/seemed to say) that the main role of a father for you is...” (if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to that understanding?”)
- Are fathers' necessary? (Father's Rights, Feminism)
  - “According to what you are saying then a child needs/does not necessarily need a father to do well in life... (if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to believe that?”)
- How is race seen in the context of RF? (Race important? In what way? )
  - “You mentioned that being black/a black father to you means that...” (if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to believe that?”)

- What is the understanding of responsibility? (paternity?, presence? economic support? nurture?)
  - So being “responsible” to you is, above all... (if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to that understanding?”)
  
- What is the context in which RF happens? (Marriage? Cohabitation?)
  - According to what you are saying then, marriage is/is not key to being a responsible father...(if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to that understanding?”) Also, if marriage reported as “key” to responsible fatherhood, then “Can RF fatherhood happen outside of marriage at all?”
  
- What gets in the way of RF happening? (Structure? Culture?)
  - So for you the main impediment to being a responsible father is... (if no follow up – “Can you tell me more about that? How did you come to that understanding?”)