Support Father Engagement: What Can we Learn from Fathers?

Kyle Miller
Illinois State University

Jordan Arellanes
Illinois State University

Lakeesha James
McLean County Fatherhood Coalition

Abstract

Fathers play a unique and important role in children's lives. However, gendered attitudes and practices with families have precluded their full engagement in children's education and development. Based on the collective effort of a local fatherhood coalition, the purpose of this community-based study was to explore how fathers view themselves as involved in children's lives and their perceived barriers to involvement in order to initiate change in local schools and community. Twenty-three fathers from ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds participated in interviews and focus groups to describe their definitions of father involvement, strengths as fathers, and needs. A collaborative, qualitative analysis of data led to the identification of four themes that framed the experiences of fathers and their needs. Mothers played a powerful role in promoting and prohibiting fathers' involvement; technology provided opportunities to connect but also interfered with attachment efforts; fathers in more privileged positions were able to focus on attachment rather than merely providing; and school engagement was rarely mentioned with a focus on extra-curricular involvement. We discuss the influence of paternal characteristics and situational factors in how these themes inform the lives of fathers and the complex nature of fatherhood. Implications for schools and communities are offered in hopes to disrupt current practices and design more inclusive and equitable approaches to including fathers in family engagement efforts.

Keywords: fathers, family engagement, maternal gatekeeping, home-school relationships, community-based research

Corresponding Author:
Kyle Miller, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Illinois State University. College of Education, Campus Box 5300, Normal, IL, 61790-5300
Email: kemille@ilstu.edu

Introduction

Although the term *parent* implies the inclusion of both mothers and fathers, the vast majority of parental investigations focus solely on mothers. There is a notable lack of attention given to fathers (Downer, 2007; Guarin & Meyer, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017). This same sentiment can be found in many school and community initiatives that direct family engagement efforts toward mothers (Guterman et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Phares et al., 2010; Rice, 2015). Decades of research and practice have stressed the *absence, disinterest,* and *lack of competence* of fathers in their children's education and development (Booth & Edwards, 1980; Pruett et al., 2017; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019), placing fathers on the fringe of parenthood. These erroneous and gendered attitudes, which are entrenched in family engagement practices, have restricted fathers' abilities to fulfill a more comprehensive role in their children's lives (Amato, 2018).

Scholarship suggests that fathers do play a unique and important role in children's lives, and different studies have documented the social, emotional, and academic benefits of positive father involvement (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Carlson, 2006; Jeynes, 2015). However, the variable ways in which fathers engage with children often remain unseen or misunderstood by schools and communities (Arditti et al., 2019; Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Antiquated stereotypes of fathers as "hands-off" in regard to children's education has limited opportunities for schools and communities to meaningfully partner with and build relationships with fathers (Guterman et al., 2018). These missed opportunities are detrimental to both fathers and their children. The purpose of this study is to investigate how fathers view themselves as involved in their children's lives and understand their perceived barriers to involvement to initiate change in a local community and support more inclusive and equitable family partnerships, programs, and resources. In particular, this article highlights the valuable and collaborative work of a local fatherhood coalition located in the Midwest of the United States, which is a driving force in helping to improve the lives of fathers and their children.

Constructions and Contributions of Father Involvement

Historically, fatherhood has operated within the constraints of societal views of masculinity, which supports a paternal focus on one's career rather than family (Amato, 2018; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). In turn, fathers in the United States have assumed the role of the *provider* in households with little emphasis on direct, hands-on engagement with their children and their children's learning (Ganong et al., 1990; Marsiglio et al., 2000). As the landscape of families and parental roles has evolved over time, a new era of fatherhood has emerged where fathers desire more supportive, attentive, and closer relationships with their children as compared with previous generations (Pleck, 2010). This generation of men, often referred to as the *modern father*, is composed of individuals who actively reject the previous generation's fathering practices, with an increasing number of stay-at-home fathers and increased time spent with children (Gottzen, 2011; Livingston & Parker, 2019; Trahan & Cheung, 2018;). Attachment, rather than simply financial provision, is at the core of fathers' desires for a more active part in their children's lives, with a focus on greater emotional and physical connections with their children (Carrillo et al., 2016; Påfs et al., 2016; Pleck & Masciardrelli, 2003). Fathers are as likely as mothers to describe parenting as central to their identity (Livingston & Parker, 2019); moreover, there is even a growing population of father activists gaining attention through social media and blogging to highlight the contributions and strengths of fathers (Scheibling, 2019).

As fathers assume a more central role in their children's lives, the children benefit in a range of ways. Recent research on fathers highlights the positive contributions fathers make to their children's cognitive gains, school achievement (McWayne et al., 2013; Gordon, 2016; Jeynes, 2015; Martin et al., 2007; Roggman et al., 2004; Wilson & Prior, 2011), social and emotional competencies (Amato &

Gilbreth, 1999; Bernard et al., 2015; Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010; Tautolo et al., 2015; Weitzman et al., 2011; Sarkadi et al., 2008), and basic needs provision (Kim et al., 2013). Therefore, school and community efforts to support the engagement of fathers will likely lead to positive outcomes for families and children (Solomon-Fears & Tollestrump, 2016). In simpler terms, we can definitively say that fathers matter.

Inequities and Bias

Although no longer an accurate representation of fatherhood, the stereotype that fathers are less accessible or interested in their children's learning and development continues to hinder the work of field practitioners (Amato, 2018; Gottzen, 2016). Many fathers believe that their responsibilities are to educate, care for, and maintain supportive relationships with their children (Pleck, 2010), but they also claim that they experience fewer inroads and responsivity within educational settings to enact these responsibilities (Osborn, 2015). Schools often think about being *culturally responsive* in relation to linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity and rarely in connection to parenting and fatherhood. However, the culture of fatherhood has changed dramatically, while the environments in which they operate have yet to adequately respond (Valiquette-Tessier , 2019; Wall, 2007).

The ways fathers engage with children does not seemingly fit parental engagement models that were designed for mothers in traditional, middle-class families (Allen, 2007). When families are viewed as systems of interdependent roles, and mothers are held as the standard for involvement, this produces a restricted view of paternal efforts (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). The implicit assumption that family–related strategies function similarly for both fathers and mothers has led to many misunderstandings and negative views of fathers (Amatea, 2013). It is important to think about the parental sharing of responsibilities and how mothers and fathers might differ in their needs and behaviors (Osborn, 2015).This lack of responsiveness perpetuates the notion that fathers are less involved than mothers, especially for Black and low-income fathers who already face systems of oppression in schools and communities (Fleck et al., 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2017).

The Ecology of Fatherhood

This study considers father involvement as a dynamic process with a variety of environmental influences that intersect with children's development both directly and indirectly (Cabrera et al., 2014). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model has guided the work of the community's fatherhood coalition as well as our study design and subsequent analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The group members believe that fathers exist within a complicated and complex world, which can variably support or hinder positive engagement with their children. Fathers serve as an influence within the child's immediate environment; however, their involvement is impacted by relationships with other caregivers, work, the economy, legal systems, media, and societal norms. Our aim is to better understand the environment that has shaped father involvement at a local level to help reduce barriers and support the goals of fathers in our community.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) believes that children's development is driven by interactions that occur at the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem levels as well as relationships among systems. At the microsystem level, father-child interactions serve as proximal processes in the child's immediate family system through direct contributions, such as father-child conversations and joint activities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). At the mesosystem level, a father's communication with the child's teacher, participation in the child's religious community, and interactions with a sibling can also help shape a child's development. This model further suggests that places and individuals outside of the

child's immediate world can inform the child's outcomes. For example, at the exosystem level, a father's employment and job demands can impact his availability (Kramer et al., 2016). At the macrosystem level, community views of fatherhood and masculinity (Amato, 2018) can influence how fatherhood is embodied at the proximal level. The chronosystem, acknowledges time, both historically and in relation to transitions during the child's life. For example, generational philosophies of fatherhood change (Adams et al., 2011), which might in turn alter fathers' interactions with their children. All such layers emerged in the ongoing coalition meetings and the data analysis for this study.

Context of the Fatherhood Coalition

A local non-profit organization that serves families and children initiated the fatherhood coalition in the fall of 2018. Based on their previous failed attempts to incorporate fathers in their parenting programs, they wanted to bring a variety of stakeholders together to reflect and brainstorm ways to better support fathers in the area. Representatives from community organizations, early childhood services, K-12 school districts, a state university, and churches gathered with local residents to share their experiences and ideas. Members of the coalition identified the following shared goals for bringing the community together around fatherhood needs: supporting fathers (not "fixing" them); identifying and building on existing services for fathers; increasing the community's knowledge and skills in father-friendly practices; providing an inclusive platform for fathers' voices; and responding to the reported needs of all fathers through community-driven processes. The coalition includes over 70 members, with approximately 20 members attending regular meetings that follow the conversation-centered World Café workshop method (see www.worldcafe.com).

The initiators of the coalition selected the term father involvement to encompass the various ways fathers can connect with and support children. In the literature on parental involvement, "involvement" is typically viewed as a more restrictive term regarding how often and to what extent parents interact with their children or act on their behalf. However, the coalition utilized the term "involvement" in a broader, multidimensional way to include the relationship context, quality of interactions, attachment, fulfillment, and intention. This broader definition is typically labeled as "engagement." Therefore, this paper uses the terms involvement and engagement interchangeably based on the work of the coalition.

Leaders of the coalition originally desired to create a quantitative survey that they would distribute electronically to fathers. They believed that the data could guide the work of the group and justify its existence. However, after discussing the matter, coalition members feared a low response rate and lack of representation from a diverse range of fathers. As a result, the coalition members decided to collect qualitative information prior to designing a larger-scale survey for the community. Indeed, qualitative methods are well suited for collecting data germane to the experiences and needs of local fathers, ensuring that the subsequent use of a quantitative instrument would remain relevant to our work (Trahan & Cheung, 2018). As an original member of the coalition with prior research skills, I offered to facilitate the research process. Our research began as a small pilot project but grew after each coalition meeting, as members desired to increase the sample size and continue exploring emerging ideas and themes.

Methods

The design of this study is rooted in the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR; Lantz et al., 2001). The goal of using this method is to make the research process a co-learning and capacity building endeavor that attends to the social inequities fathers face in the local community

and beyond (Lee et al., 2016). The CBPR method combines research tools with local knowledge and social networks to address local issues. The purpose of CBPR is to use social science techniques to support community activism and change (Schensul et al., 2008). This method challenges elitist structures that dominate the production of scientific knowledge and instead places the research process and use of the results in the hands of community members. This involves shared decision-making power, co-learning, reciprocal transfers of expertise, and mutual ownership of the process and products of the research (Viswanathan et al., 2004). For example, instead of a researcher independently designing instruments for data collection based on previous research and theories, community members share their local knowledge to complement the research base to co-design the instruments based on the group's goals and the problem(s) they want to address. The CBPR method helps increase the value of studies for both researchers and communities as groups collectively move toward scholarly activism. The main investigator was a member of the coalition and involved co-members in the design, data collection, and analysis components of the study.

Collectively, we developed the following questions to guide our inquiry and analysis:

- RQ1: How do fathers describe their involvement with children and what it means to be an involved father?
    - RQ1a: How are fathers involved with children's education and/or schools?
- RQ2: What are fathers' perceived barriers to involvement with their children?

Within the CBPR design, we selected the grounded theory methodology to inductively identify themes connected to our research questions in conjunction with the interpretivist paradigm. Grounded theory is based on the interpretivist perspective that qualitative research is never purely objective and that multiple realities can exist (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through this design, we embraced the idea that participants would share their perspectives based on their perceived reality of fatherhood (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Participants and Location

The study sample included fathers (N=23) who live in a small-sized city in the Midwest. Fathers were recruited through the fatherhood coalition, local organizations, and school districts. The only criteria were that participants identified as a father and lived in the specified county. Fathers were initially recruited to participate in one-on-one interviews. Fliers were electronically and physically distributed through listservs, community boards, and at public events to find volunteers for the study. Additionally, service providers informed clients and group members of the research opportunity. Interested fathers were contacted by the main investigator to arrange for a time and place to meet for the interview. Fourteen fathers participated in one-on-one interviews during the spring and summer of 2019.

Fourteen fathers also participated in focus group sessions held in the fall of 2019. Participants were recruited through the same channels as the prior interview recruitment process. Additionally, all interview participants were personally invited by email, with five volunteering to also participate in the focus group portion of the study. Involvement in the focus group portion required a two-hour window of availability on a Saturday afternoon at a public library in the area. Table 1 provides a list of participant characteristics.

Table 1

Focus Group Characteristics

	Interviews (N=14)	Focus Groups (N=14)
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	6 (42.9%)	6 (42.9%)
Asian	0	1 (7.1%)
White	8 (57.1%)	7 (50%)
Income Level		
Above 35,000	10 (71.4%)	10 (71.4%)
25,000-34,999	2 (14.3%)	3 (21.4%)
Below 25,000	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)
Education Level		
Graduate Degree	2 (14.3%)	4 (28.6%)
College Degree	6 (42.9%)	7 (50%)
Associate's Degree	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)
High School/GED	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)
Family Structure		
Married	5 (35.7%)	10 (71.4%)
Blended Family	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)
Divorced	2 (14.3%)	2 (14.3%)
Non-residential	2 (14.3%)	0
Co-parent	1 (7.1%)	0
Widower	1 (7.1%)	0
Age Range	23-60	27-59

Data Sources

This study's data sources include one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and a sociodemographic form. The coalition desired to conduct one-on-one interviews to develop a sense of individual father strengths and needs before moving to larger focus group sessions. The interview script was co-constructed with members of the fatherhood coalition and included questions related to family dynamics, current involvement, supports and barriers to involvement, and general needs and potential community responses. The coalition developed the interview questions to reflect its goals by beginning with fathers' strengths and then addressing self-identified personal and environmental barriers to involvement. The interview script and semi-structured facilitation was designed to elicit fathers' unique stories, experiences, parenting skills, and successes. We also aimed to actively push against the deficit-based views that often define father-related data collection (Wilson & Thompson, 2021). The main investigator administered one-on-one interviews that ranged from 20 minutes to two hours.

The focus group interviews followed the same flow of questions as the interviews. However, the focus groups ended with all fathers coming together to share their advice and guidance on how the community can better support their current involvement and respond to their needs. Two coalition members who identified as fathers volunteered to take the required ethics training to serve as focus group facilitators. The facilitators collected sociodemographic forms, administered the questions, and

engaged in the focus group conversations. All audio recordings of interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. They were then compiled with the interviewer's and facilitators' reflective notes from each interview and focus group session, respectively.

Interviews and focus groups were treated non-hierarchically and used to create a more coherent and nuanced understanding of fathers that would not have been achieved by one method alone (Lamert & Loiselle, 2008). Semi-structured interviews provided a more intimate method to collect detailed accounts of fathers' thoughts, experiences, beliefs, and ideas through scripted questions and follow-up prompts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Focus groups allowed for discussions among participants where they commented on one another's experiences and questioned one another to unveil aspects of father involvement that may not have emerged in one-on-one interviews (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). We purposefully did not require fathers to participate in both methods or restrict participation to only one method. We assumed that some fathers may feel more comfortable in a one-on-one setting, while others might desire a group discussion, and others might be motivated to share their stories and experiences in multiple spaces (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). The two methods were not utilized to confirm data but rather to create a more comprehensive picture of personal and contextual dimensions of fathers' experiences and views.

Data Analysis

A research team of one faculty member, three undergraduate students, and one graduate student began the analysis as soon as interviews commenced. Additionally, a small team of coalition members took the required ethics training to more intimately familiarize themselves with the data and engage in analytic discussions and data review. The analysis followed Boyatzis' (1998) process for developing codes and thematically analyzing data, which incorporated elements of the constant comparative method during analysis phases (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The coding and analysis were inductive, which allowed for the discovery of new ideas and ways to systematically think about father involvement. Members of the research team were assigned to specific interviews where they summarized the interview and then presented it to the team. The summary was followed by the identification of open codes connected to the transcript, which were documented in a working codebook. We continued with this approach as focus group data were added.

During weekly research meetings, we compared interview and focus group summaries as the group moved from open to axial coding of larger, hierarchical codes. For example, early in the interviews, participants identified "legal issues" as an important concept that was interfering with father involvement. However, as we added additional data and revisited prior coding, we discovered that legal issues were part of a larger concept related to the power of mothers and gender bias. The working codebook was continually revised to reflect hierarchical codes, which were then re-applied to full transcripts using NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2010). We further interrogated codes to arrive at a more selective coding process in line with the study's theoretical lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). We consistently shared codes and emerging themes with the larger coalition for feedback and insights at roundtable discussions implemented from the spring of 2019 until the spring of 2020.

Findings

The thematic analysis led to four main themes. These themes fall into different ecological spaces within children's worlds. The first theme focuses on the relationship with the mother at the mesosystem level and is also guided by parenting philosophies from a macrosystem level. Themes two and three are related to direct interactions with the child involving technology and time management with the child at the microsystem level. Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the relationship with the

school at the mesosystem level. The following sections describe the themes with the support of quotations and data narratives.

Theme 1: Relationship with the Mother

Although not directly asked about mothers, the participating fathers often referenced the children's mothers in interviews and focus group discussions. The fathers explained that the mother and mother-child relationship both informed the quantity and quality of their involvement. Gatekeeping and co-parenting philosophies were the main subthemes within paternal discussions of mothers. As one father said in a focus group, "We really can't do this work [supporting fathers] without working with mothers." Each of the following subtheme highlights the power of mothers within family systems.

Gatekeeping

Fathers described mothers as the gatekeepers of involvement who possess the power to open or close the gate to their children's lives. Approximately one-third of participants reported a weak relationship with the child's mother, which interfered with the father's involvement. One father explained, "Right now she [the mother] isn't speaking to me. It has been up and down for the last eight years. When she speaks to me, I get to see my kid. When she doesn't, then I don't." Furthermore, fathers highlighted the court system and other community programs as assisting in mothers' power to block or limit fathers' involvement, suggesting that gatekeeping is a multifaceted and dynamic process (Puhlman & Pasley, 2017). One father reflected:

She [the mother] took the kids and moved to Iowa. She basically kidnapped them, and I had no number to reach them. I kept contacting agencies and the court system, but no one took me seriously. They basically took the position like – maybe she left for a reason. I had to hire a lawyer, and it took me five years to finally get them back. And even when I finally had some rights to see them, I was still missing out on so much. I'd love [to] talk to their teachers or attend their events, but that was off limits for a long time.

For most fathers in this category, it was not just about mothers possessing the power to open or close the gate but that maternal power was amplified within social and legal systems that favored mothers.

The other participants reported a strong relationship with their children's mothers, which helped them maintain involvement. One respondent stated, "My wife knows a lot about kids, so that helps me. She wants to see us spend time together, so she makes that happen." Similar to this father, many participants viewed mothers as one of the main supports to their involvement, as mothers actively facilitated father-child interactions and encouraged engagement (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). The majority of these fathers lived with the mother and children, but they were from diverse sociodemographic and racial groups.

Co-Parenting and Philosophies

In addition to discussing gatekeeping, fathers discussed the importance of "being on the same page" with the mother. One father, Michael, shared his ongoing struggle with managing two different parenting approaches with his children. After years of fighting for parental rights, the four children currently live with him full-time and visit the mother once per month. He shared:

The barrier that I'm dealing with are the different type of lifestyles between me and my ex-wife. Me, myself, my value is my kids first. Her value is her first and then my kids. I just live on a whole different train of thought. She doesn't really parent, she just lets them sit in front of a screen for a weekend. She doesn't take them anywhere…she doesn't talk with them.

Another father, Steve, shared similar frustrations related to the mother's parenting philosophy during a focus group session. As with Michael, he had full custody of his daughter and reported the following stress and frustration with bi-monthly visits to the mother's house:

Steve: For me, the one and only barrier is really the other parent [mother]. I have constant issues with that. And I don't think it will ever stop, and I don't think it will ever change. It will forever be the biggest barrier I have with my kids. The lifestyle [at] that house is totally different than the lifestyle at my house. And when my daughter comes back from her house, she has a different attitude, and it makes it really hard on us.

    Jude: You're always rebuilding?

    Steve: Yeah, it's a constant reintegration into my own house and it sucks.

    Terry: I'm going through that right now. And it is crazy.

    Steve: I had no idea how much two days could change a child.

Philosophical tensions were not necessarily a symptom of blended or divorce family circumstances but rather a result of communication and the quality of the relationship with the mother (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). For example, Chris, who identified as a divorced father of two girls, described the mutual respect and trust with his daughters' mother. He credited their ongoing communication and commitment to a similar parenting philosophy as the source of success for their daughters' development. He said:

I will call my ex-wife and I might question whether I'm doing the right thing. But she's like, "You are a great dad." And then she'll explain to me, "You've never missed an event. You put our girls first. You teach them about being a leader." We are divorced, but we have always been on the same page, which helps us both be better parents.

Other fathers also reported that sharing the philosophy that parenting is a partnership, rather than accepting traditional gender roles, helps them raise their children more effectively and allows fathers to be more hands-on with their children.

Theme 2: Technology – Friend or Foe?

The most novel theme that emerged was the impact of technology. Fathers described technology as ubiquitous and alluring. Fathers observed that children's and parents' increased screen time increased hindered their abilities to connect with children and spend time with them in meaningful ways. However, they also recognized that technology can also help them connect remotely with their child or create opportunities for different types of connections.

Technology as Foe

Most participants viewed technology as a barrier to involvement. They described their children as "addicted" or "obsessed" with technology, and several admitted to their own phone addiction. Screen time interfered with these fathers' abilities to connect with children. One non-residential father, Dimitri, shared, "Their mom buys them all these pads and screens. When I call to talk to my kids, it's like they can't even have a conversation with me. I hear seven things going on in the background, and I have to say, 'Can you put that down?' It's really frustrating." Similarly, a residential father, Jeff, shared, "I mean it's like, *play Fortnight or hang out with dad?* I can't compete with that. He would much rather close his door and do whatever it is they do on Fortnight." Another residential father shared, "My daughters are glued to their phones, and it is hard to get their attention most times." This was especially challenging for fathers of teenagers who had their own smartphones, tablets, or video games and greater independence to manage their time.

Fathers of younger children felt more in control of limiting technology use. For example, Ellis shared:

Most of my childhood was in front of the TV or video games – literally all day. It makes me kind of sick thinking about that. My kids get 30 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays and an hour and a half on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. I want them to have other experiences. I want *us* to have other experiences."

As with Ellis, several fathers communicated that they enforce strict technology rules to support their involvement with their children. However, most fathers described a general frustration without a clear plan of how to address the interference of technology regardless of socioeconomic status, race, and family structure.

Technology as Friend

A few participants viewed technology as a way to spend time with their children through gaming or watching shows together. One father stated:

My son, he's an introvert. He's into video games and - you know, anything with tech. So, me and him, our favorite thing to do…we're going to like Comic-Con and video game conventions and that kind of thing.

Another father who identified himself as a "tech person" highlighted the value of technology in bonding and spending time with his son. However, he also clarified that technology needs to be used *with* the child and not as a babysitter. Jay explained, "We watch shows together, and we talk about them. I've learned so much about him by hearing about what he thinks or even what he wants to watch." This father was also involving the son in his online gaming hobby. He explained, "playing games online can really help him. There is so much problem solving and thinking involved." He viewed technology as an opportunity to spend time with the child while supporting important elements of his early learning. This approach to finding a shared father-child interest or activity is consistent with previous research on father engagement and allows fathers to help facilitate language and social-emotional development (Lynch, 2019). In these cases, it was through the use of technology.

Technology also assisted several fathers with safety, parental monitoring, and communication with their children when they were away from home. One father explained, "We have an app to be able to locate her (daughter). This helps with safety." Another father identified the valuable role of technology in keeping him connected to his children while they are living with the mother in another household. He stated, "It is the way I can still check in with my kids or talk with them when they are gone for a while. Sometimes you don't know what's going on, and you want to hear their voice. And maybe they want to hear my voice, too – or even see me." Technology provided remote avenues to perform what they viewed as parenting duties.

These data represent the mixed views on technology as both a friend and foe. It was an area where fathers desired greater support or ideas from other fathers in navigating the constantly evolving world of their children. Fathers acknowledged that technology is part of their children's world and were working towards setting boundaries and identifying ways to use technology together (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

Theme 3: Doing Something *for* Versus *with* Children

A divide emerged in the sample between participants who prioritized the importance of financial contributions to their children's wellbeing and participants who emphasized spending time with their children. This theme was identified early in the analysis when some fathers suggested their involvement was based on what they did *for* their child, while others suggested their involvement was founded on what they did *with* the child. Although participants tended to fit into one of these subthemes (*for* versus *with*), there were still elements of both subthemes within every interview. Almost every father felt somewhat torn between providing for children's material needs and building a strong, emotional attachment with them.

Instrumental Involvement

Five of the interview participants described contributing to their children's lives by advancing their careers or gaining money to support the monetary needs of their children and their children's development. One of the participants, Tyler, described his unconventional schedule of afternoon classes and working an over-night job to achieve an associate's degree and support his family financially. He said, "It makes it hard because I get home at seven in the morning and want to play with my daughter. I mean she is only three months old. But I do have to sleep for a while. It won't be this way forever." This father anticipated that by advancing his education, he would have opportunities for jobs that would normalize his schedule and allow for more time with his daughter.

The other fathers who prioritized financial contributions were in the process of trying to legally gain more parental rights and responsibilities, and they believed that monetary contributions were the optimal way for them to contribute to their children's upbringing based on their current circumstances. One father shared, "I work three jobs so he can be okay and have the things he needs. His mom won't let me see him, and the court stuff has been going on for four years. So, it is my way to help out, and he can know I'm working hard for him." Another father shared, "I know money doesn't do everything, but it helps. I mean you can't deny that money helps when it comes to kids. I can go to bed at night knowing that I helped with clothes, gas, you know."

This subtheme did not emerge in the focus group discussions other than participants suggesting that they tried to avoid setting financial contributions as a goal in parenting. One father shared:

Before we moved here, I used to work all the time and on weekends. It was just hard to be there, and I wasn't accessible. I mean it was all financial. That's who I was – the parent who made sure we had enough money. I look back with regret. That's not who I want to be. That's not the father I want to be. I want to do stuff with my kids. They are almost teenagers and I need to be there.

This quotation reflects a general sentiment among the overall sample that financial support is not enough and should not be the focus of involvement. However, for fathers with limited access to their children, financial support was a way to feel a sense of connection with the child.

Attunement and Attachment

The majority of participants from interviews and focus groups viewed involvement as bonding and connecting with their children in a direct way through play, informal conversations, and coaching. They favored spending time with children over making money for the family, although they still felt that financial responsibility was important. During the focus group, Alex reflected, "It's like what we get caught up with as men. Feeling the need to be the provider, rather than going to events. But being present in your child's life and whatever it is that they're doing, that is much more valuable than making more money." This was one example of many fathers explicitly rejecting historic images of fathers as the provider and reimaging their role as accessible, caring, and hands-on parental figures.

Attachment required a focus on children's social and emotional wellbeing. For example, one father said, "For me, it is about being aware about where she is at emotionally. Like the other day, she just seemed sad, so I was sure to ask her questions about how she was feeling. It ended up that it was related to something going on with her friends, and we talked through it." For this father, who had a history of mental health and substance abuse issues, he prioritized supporting his daughter's social and emotional needs through conversations and affection. Many fathers responded that they were working towards sensitivity in parenting and responding to children's emotional states in a developmentally responsive way, which mirrors the cultural shift from provider to caregiver (Livingston & Parker, 2019). As fathers, participants desired to sensitively support their children's

confidence, emotional coping skills, and positive decision-making. One father in the focus group highlighted the importance of "just keeping things positive and making sure that they can see both sides of the decisions they are making and their choices, and just try to keep them positive."

Building and maintaining a connection with their children also required that fathers possessed an awareness of where they themselves were at emotionally and what they needed in the moment. Another father, who described himself as a co-parent, shared:

When we moved in together, I became a father of four – just like that. It was crazy. And – [my partner] was very up front in telling me I could be as involved as I wanted. The younger kids were a little more open to me, which I guess makes sense. They even call me *Dad* now. The older kids usually call me by my name, which is fine. I don't want to push anything. It is what they are comfortable with. I just try to read them and consistently let them know that I care about them.

Although this father was in unique position in not being the birth parent of his four children, learning to read children and figuring out what they needed in the given moment was a consistent factor highlighted by many fathers. Especially with teenagers, fathers learned to appropriately respond to changing boundaries and needs with each new stage to preserve a positive attachment with their children. Attachment and attunement were more greatly emphasized by residential fathers with full-time jobs and benefits, who were not openly worried about their current income and feeling the additional stress of earning more money for the family or child.

Being the financial provider was not the ultimate goal of fatherhood and involvement for this sample of participants, but it was viewed as a necessary function of their role. It was an ongoing balancing act to neutralize financial needs and focus on bonding with their children. Some fathers also reflected on previous phases of their lives when substance abuse or mental health issues precluded them from "being there" for their children. These fathers expressed personal disappointment in their inability to provide financial support at times, but they expressed even greater regret in missing out on spending time with their children and being fully present in their children's lives.

Theme 4: School and Community Involvement

As with all other themes, fathers were not directly asked about children's schools or community, and the topics of classrooms, teachers, and schools rarely emerged. A few fathers discussed direct and active involvement with schools and children's classrooms, but they had to initiate that involvement. Instead, the majority of fathers highlighted their role in supporting children's extra-curricular interests. Most consistently, fathers described involvement in terms of attending performances, events, or games at schools through the school and community.

Initiating Contact

Four fathers reported involvement with schools and teachers, and these fathers proactively and intentionally initiated those relationships. One father, Jeff, explained:

At the beginning of every year, I would approach the teacher and tell her I wanted to help out and be a part of the class. I only ever had one teacher turn me down. As a cop, I had some weekdays off, so I could go help out in the class. Now, I get that isn't the reality for most fathers, especially fathers without a job or education, they might not be taken seriously by a teacher.

In the few instances when fathers mentioned schools or school-related learning, they often deferred to the efforts of the mother or described indirect involvement by encouraging the child or telling them they value learning. This can explain why mothers are often more visible to school personnel (Lynch & Zwerling, 2020). A few fathers were still fighting for parental rights and were therefore unable to build relationships with teachers or schools.

The analysis involved examining these participant outliers to best understand who viewed themselves as involved with schools and why. The father who identified as a widower described his

life as a single father of two and carrying the full responsibility of every aspect of development for his children. Communicating with the school was one of the many responsibilities he discussed. Specifically, he talked about priming teachers for situations related to the family's composition and the loss of the children's mother. He shared:

I ask to meet with the teacher at the beginning of the year just to explain our situation. I ask them questions, like, "What is your plan for Mother's Day if you have other kids make cards or a drawing for their mothers?" Usually, they have no idea. And I get it, they don't have to know everything, so I give them ideas. Maybe you can ask them to write a letter to their grandma or a neighbor. I just have to be proactive with teachers because we are a unique family.

As Curtis described above, his family circumstances prompted him to initiate relationships with teachers. Another father, Andrew, self-identified as an activist who valued and felt comfortable approaching teachers and serving on school and community committees. Another father, Steve, regretted his mother's lack of involvement in his education and prioritized breaking that pattern with his children by joining the parent-teacher organization. The fourth father, Jeff, credited his involvement to his outgoing personality. These fathers ranged in education levels, races, and family compositions. However, they shared the characteristics of living above the poverty level and living with their children. Conversely, several fathers who were still fighting for caregiving rights desired more information about their child's experiences in school but were not listed as a contact for teachers. They believed that they were unable to communicate with teachers or schools until the legal process was complete.

Extra-Curricular Focus

Most fathers viewed themselves as involved outside of the classroom setting, which is a common trend for fathers who most commonly report positive interactions with their children through sports and other outside activities (Knoester & Randolph, 2019). Attending children's events and games was a top priority for fathers in this study. Several fathers described their overall goal as a father to "never miss an event" and "always be in the stands." Other fathers desired to take a main role in extra-curricular involvement through coaching or assisting children's sports, groups, and other passions. One father explained, "They've been involved in basketball and track and volleyball. Our summer is all basketball. Yeah, I love that time with my kids and watching whatever it is that they're doing." Another father shared:

I find myself involved in a lot of the kids' activities. I've helped coach a lot of my kids' sports. I even drove the basketball bus to and from games for a while. And again, it's just time, I get to see my daughter…I mean I just get to be there and watch and see her talking and interacting.

These activities offered fathers scheduled time to spend time with their children or observe them with their peers. Another father shared that he would enroll his kids in every program he would hear about from the school. This theme was consistent across all fathers who participated in interviews and focus groups. Even for fathers who were still seeking rights, learning about children's extra-curricular interests and membership allowed for meaningful connection points.

Discussion

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework suggests that paternal engagement exists within a larger context of interconnecting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This aligns with the responses of our participants, as they explained and reflected upon the complexities of their lives and the everchanging environments that affected their experiences as fathers. The culture of fatherhood has changed, which has transformed children's proximal environment. However, this transformation is often unseen or

misunderstood in educational settings (Posey-Maddox, 2017), with limited studies focusing on the personal perspectives and needs of fathers (Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, family configurations are increasingly diverse. Within the sample for this study, there were six different types of fathers and family configurations. Although there were many overlapping themes, each father shared a unique story and set of needs. Listening to fathers is an essential first step, especially for educators and schools who have historically focused on mothers (Phares et al., 2010).

Influence of Mothers

The most robust finding was the power of mothers, who can either promote or stifle fathers' engagement efforts. As most family-related efforts are directed toward mothers, mothers often become the face of the family (Amatea, 2013). Indeed, the four fathers who reported involvement with schools had to initiative this involvement. If information and opportunities are funneled through mothers, gatekeeping can occur (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). *Are emails only addressed to mothers? Are mothers first to be called?* These simple, yet consequential practices can reinforce inequities for fathers and their desires to be included. Moreover, non-residential and lower-income fathers described years of legal battles to gain regular access to their children. This shows how learning about the child's father through the perspective of mothers might create a biased and erroneous view of fathers' ongoing efforts to gain access to the child's world and support the child's development. Deficit-based views of fathers that are promoted in society may underpin practitioners' willingness to readily accept the mainstream storyline that a father does not desire to be involved or contribute in any way (de Montigny et al., 2017).

Deficit-based views of fathers may also emerge when we evaluate a father's engagement through a mother's mindset. Fathers might not desire to engage their children in traditional school-based or "motherly" ways. Instead, they may prefer involvement outside of the school setting in ways that remain unseen or misunderstood by schools (Arditti et al., 2019). This signals that schools and communities need to shift their views and expectations of fathers and work with fathers to design activities that fit their interests and comfort zones. Otherwise, we will likely continue to marginalize fathers in educational contexts (Amato, 2018).

Promoting Inclusivity

Feeling torn between earning money and spending time with children was a tension expressed by most participants. Schools and communities can exacerbate this internal struggle if opportunities that *seen* and recognized by school and community professionals are only scheduled during their work hours. School and community practices should adapt to the timing and accessibility needs of fathers to make these practices more father-friendly. Furthermore, schools and community-based programs must define engagement in a manner that includes the various ways through which fathers can and want to engage with their children. They should be responsive to paternal needs rather than force fathers into traditional activities performed at traditional times.

Teachers and service providers who accept the stereotype of the "absent father" are neglecting to understand the ecological influences that serve as barriers to fathers being seen and supported by professionals in the field. Research suggests that fathers, especially Black fathers, often have to take extra steps to make their presence known by schools, such as by proactively introducing themselves to principals and teachers (Posey-Maddox, 2017). This aligns with this study's findings, as fathers who viewed themselves as involved with schools had to initiate contact. Schools and community-based programs can better support father engagement by actively seeking the opinions and perspectives of fathers and reimagining family engagement activities through a father-inclusive lens. Some changes can be as simple as including fathers on forms, addressing communication directly to fathers so they

do not have to initiate contact, and recognizing the educational value of children's extra-curricular activities.

Overall, family engagement efforts have largely targeted mothers, especially from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds (Posey-Maddox, 2017). This has created a systemic bias against fathers and their engagement with children's education (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Partnering with fathers to build on their current areas of engagement can benefit students and help schools and communities fulfill the goal of creating more inclusive and welcoming environments for family members (Lynch & Zwerling, 2020). Additionally, schools should address specific barriers for fathers while simultaneously seeking strengths and resources that may be left untapped within the community (Allen, 2007; de Montigny et al., 2017).

Fatherhood is currently being redefined in society, and the fathers in this study actively rejected historic portrayals of fathers as the *provider*. Instead, they aimed for relationships with their children based on attunement and attachment. Although attachment has been consistently explored in relation to mothers, paternal attachment has received less scholarly attention (Vreeswijk et al., 2015). As with other studies, the majority of father participants highlighted their motivation to deeply connect with their children (Palm, 2014). At the same time, they also questioned whether they are doing enough as a father. Some of this self-doubt related to the lack of inclusivity in family engagement efforts, while other comments reflected general parenting struggles.

Technology

Fathers reported mixed opinions on technology and whether it supported or hindered attachment with their children. The previous literature supports that, with technology, you get *the good, the bad, and the ugly* (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016), similar to how fathers in the study wondered whether technology is a *friend* or *foe*. Watching television and playing video games together as a family have been associated with increased connection between parents and children (Padilla-Walker et al., 2012), which was supported by several fathers in this study. However, technology also presents a barrier to quality involvement (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016), which was also identified by the majority of our participants. Several fathers were self-aware that their technology use interfered with quality parenting and connecting with children, while most struggled to compete with their children's technology use. Technological interruptions, referred to as *technoference* in the literature, interfere with father-child interactions and have also been associated with reports of externalizing and internalizing behaviors in children (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018). This is an area that schools and communities can jointly explore and develop solutions for with fathers.

What Can Schools and Communities Do?

The needs of fathers range from simple to more complex needs. Helping fathers address parenting issues, such as the interference of technology, is a concrete and tangible effort that can be supported by the community. In contrast, the gender and racial biases that saturate institutionalized practices call for a much deeper examination of implicit bias in programming and communication. Agencies, organizations, and schools can audit and reflect upon their current practices. Instead of asking *if* they are favoring mother engagement, these entities need to begin by asking, "*how* are we favoring mother engagement?" It is safe to assume that systems are operating in favor of mothers and that we should focus on the *how* rather than the *if*.

Family engagement scholarship and practices implicitly send the message that families from low-income backgrounds should be the focus of efforts (Arditti et al., 2019). However, fathers from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances volunteered for this study and were interested in receiving support and supporting other fathers in the community. This suggests that schools and community

organizations need to reimagine their work more inclusively for all fathers regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and family structure. This CBPR project has helped build relationships between academic, school, and community-based stakeholders to support research and action on father involvement (Lee et al., 2016). This co-learning process has helped schools and communities learn from and about paternal strengths and barriers to involvement. The creation of a fatherhood coalition provided a space for individuals involved with schools, after-school programming, and family services to come together, share, reflect, and brainstorm based on the information provided by fathers.

Limitations

Although this study offers authentic data that can be used to address some proximal and remote barriers to father engagement, it is important to note its limitations. First, the sample includes the perspectives of majority African American and white fathers. Greater incorporation of fathers from different ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as same-sex couples and younger fathers, can enhance this work. Conducting a similar study in a different geographic region or among a different community population can also provide important insights regarding the context of paternal experiences and needs. Although this study offers important information for schools and communities, our work is clearly only the beginning. The next steps should include developing a mixed-methods survey instrument to reach a wider, more representative, sample of fathers and measure community change in response to the data on fathers. All of these efforts should also continue to be performed in conjunction with fathers and local stakeholders, who both offer important expertise regarding the questions that need to be answered and the avenues for using scholarship to enact meaningful change (Schensul et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The culture of fatherhood has changed dramatically in the last few decades, but social barriers continue to hinder fathers from fully embodying burgeoning images of the "new father." Fathers in this study desired to focus their parenting on attachment, co-parenting, joint activities with children, and reducing the interference of technology. However, real world realities, legal challenges, and gendered school and community practices hindered fathers from achieving their parenting goals. These findings contribute to scholarship on the disconnect between fathers' ideal versions of themselves and their current involvement behaviors due to the myriad obstacles that interfere with paternal involvement (Wall & Arnold, 2007). Ongoing investigations of local and national challenges to father engagement will likely help focus efforts to reduce these barriers.

As family structures continue to diversify (Amatea, 2013), challenges can mount for fathers and father figures who fall outside of traditional images of the family (Arditti et al., 2019). Additionally, judging fathers and their engagement based on parenting models that have centered mothers (Lechowicz et al., 2018; Possey-Maddox, 2017) leads to a misrepresentation of fathers and their contributions to their children's development. Rather than imposing traditional models of engagement, or focusing on what fathers are not doing, it may be more advantageous to understand and support the various ways in which fathers authentically engage with their children (Arditti et al., 2019). This article has highlighted fathers' voices through our belief that fathers know the most about their lives, circumstances, and needs. We hope that educational systems and programs embrace a similar process. As families and fatherhood are reimagined, this demands attendant changes in the work of schools and communities.

References

Adams, M., Walker, C., & O'Connell, P. (2011). Invisible or involved fathers? A content analysis of representations of parenting in young children's picture books in the UK. *Sex Roles*, *65*(3-4), 259-270.

Allen, J.B. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press. Amatea, E. S. (2013). *Building culturally responsive family-school relationships* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Amato, V. (2018). The social construction of a possible male gender bias is negatively impacting fathers in child welfare services: Hammering a square peg into a round hole. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *28*(4), 466-474.

Amato, P.R., & Rivera, F. (1999). Paternal involvement and children's behavior. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61,* 375-384.

Arditti, J. A., Molloy, S., Spiers, S., & Johnson, E. I. (2019). Perceptions of nonresident father involvement among low-income youth and their single parents. *Family Relations*, *68*(1), 68-84.

Bernard, S. N., Whitson, M., & Kaufman, J. (2015). The moderating effect of positive father engagement and accessibility on a school-based system of care intervention for mental health outcomes of children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *24*(10), 2923-2933.

Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Brinkmann, S. & Kvale, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, *22*(6), 723-742.

Bronfenbrenner, U. & Morris, A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon and R. Lerner, *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (pp.993-1028). New York: Wiley & Sons.

Cabrera, N., Fitzgerald, H., Bradley, R., & Roggman, L. (2014). The ecology of father–child relationships: An expanded model. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, *6*, 336–354.

Carrillo, S., Bermúdez, M., Gutiérrez, L. S., Camila, M., & Delgado, X. (2016). Father's perceptions of their role and involvement in the family: A qualitative study in a Colombian sample. *Revista Costarricense de Psicología*, *35*(2), 37-54.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Carlson, M. J. (2006). Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *68*(1), 137-154.

de Montigny, F., Gervais, C., Meunier, S., & Dubeau, D. (2017). Professionals' positive perceptions of fathers are associated with more favourable attitudes towards including them in family interventions. *Acta Paediatrica*, *106*(12), 1945-1951.

Downer, J.T. (2007). Father involvement during early childhood. In R.C. Pianta, M.J. Cox, and K.L. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness and the transition to kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 329-354). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Fagan, J., & Kaufman, R. (2015). Co-parenting relationships among low-income, unmarried parents: Perspectives of fathers in fatherhood programs. *Family Court Review*, *53*, 304–316.

Fleck, M. O., Hudson, D. B., Abbott, D. A., & Reisbig, A. M. (2013). You can't put a dollar amount on presence: Young, non-resident, low-income, African American fathers. *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing, 36*(3), 225-240.

Ganong, L. H., Coleman, M., & Mapes, D. (1990). A meta-analytic review of family structure stereotypes. Journal of Marriage and Family, 52, 287–297.

Goncy, E. A., & van Dulmen, M. H. (2010). Fathers do make a difference: Parental involvement and adolescent alcohol use. *Fathering, 8*(1), 93-108.

Gottzén, L. (2011). Involved fatherhood? Exploring the educational work of middle-class men. *Gender and Education, 23*(5), 619-634.

Gordon, M. S. (2016). Community disadvantage and adolescent's academic achievement: The mediating role of father influence. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 25*(7), 2069-2078.

Guarin, A., & Meyer, D. R. (2018). Are low earnings of nonresidential fathers a barrier to their involvement with children?. *Children and Youth Services Review, 91*, 304-318.

Guterman, N. B., Bellamy, J. L., & Banman, A. (2018). Promoting father involvement in early home visiting services for vulnerable families: Findings from a pilot study of "Dads matter". *Child abuse & neglect, 76*, 261-272.

Jeynes, W. H. (2015). A meta-analysis: The relationship between father involvement and student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 50*(4), 387-423.

Kim, P., Mayes, L., Feldman, R., Leckman, J. F., & Swain, J. E. (2013). Early postpartum parental preoccupation and positive parenting thoughts: Relationship with parent–infant interaction. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 34*(2), 104-116.

Kim, S. W., & Hill, N. E. (2015). Including fathers in the picture: A meta-analysis of parental involvement and students' academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 107*(4), 919-934.

Knoester, C., & Randolph, T. (2019). Father-child sports participation and outdoor activities: Patterns and implications for health and father-child relationships. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 36*(4), 322-329.

Kramer, K. Z., Myhra, L. L., Zuiker, V. S., & Bauer, J. W. (2016). Comparison of poverty and income disparity of single mothers and fathers across three decades: 1990–2010. *Gender Issues, 33*(1), 22-41.

Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. G. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to enhance data richness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(2), 228-237.

Lantz, P. M., Viruell-Fuentes, E., Israel, B. A., Softley, D., & Guzman, R. (2001). Can communities and academia work together on public health research? Evaluation results from a community-based participatory research partnership in Detroit. *Journal of Urban Health, 78*(3), 495-507.

Lechowicz, M. E., Jiang, Y., Tully, L. A., Burn, M. T., Collins, D. A., Hawes, D. J., & Frick, P. J. (2019). Enhancing father engagement in parenting programs: Translating research into practice recommendations. *Australian Psychologist, 54*(2), 83-89.

Lee, S. J., Hoffman, G., & Harris, D. (2016). Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) needs assessment of parenting support programs for fathers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 66*, 76-84.

Livingston, G., & Parker, K. (2019). *8 Facts about American Dads.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Lynch, J. (2019). Father reflections on their involvement with primary school students: Connections to school literacy learning. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice, 68*(1), 396-416.

Lynch, J., & Zwerling, H. (2020). Bringing neighborhood dads into classrooms: Supporting literacy engagement. *The Reading Teacher, 74*(2), 169-178.

Martin, A., Ryan, R. M., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007). The joint influence of mother and father parenting on child cognitive outcomes at age 5. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *22*(4), 423-439.

McDaniel, B. T., & Coyne, S. M. (2016). Technology interference in the parenting of young children: Implications for mothers' perceptions of coparenting. *The Social Science Journal*, *53*(4), 435-443.

McDaniel, B. T., & Radesky, J. S. (2018). Technoference: Parent distraction with technology and associations with child behavior problems. *Child Development*, *89*(1), 100-109.

McWayne, C., Downer, J. T., Campos, R., & Harris, R. D. (2013). Father involvement during early childhood and its association with children's early learning: A meta-analysis. *Early Education & Development*, *24*(6), 898-922.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Dickinson, W. B., Leech, N. L., & Zoran, A. G. (2009). A qualitative framework for collecting and analyzing data in focus group research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *8*(3), 1-21.

Osborn, M. (2015). Young fathers: unseen but not invisible. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, *4*(2), 323-329.

Padilla-Walker, L., Coyne, S. M., & Fraser, A. M. (2012). Getting a high-speed family connection: associations between family media use and family connection. *Family Relations*, *61*(3), 426-440.

Palm, G. (2014). Attachment theory and fathers: Moving from "being there" to "being with". *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 6(4), 282–297.

Phares, V., Rojas, A., Thurston, I. B., & Hankinson, J. C. (2010). Including fathers in clinical interventions for children and adolescents. *The role of the father in child development*, *5*, 459-485.

Pleck, J. H. (2010). Paternal involvement revised conceptualization and theoretical linkages with child outcomes. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development (5th ed., pp. 58–93). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Pleck, J. H., & Masciadrelli, B. P. (2003). Paternal involvement: Levels, sources, and consequences. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development (4th ed., pp.222–271). New York: Wiley.

Posey-Maddox, L. (2017). Schooling in suburbia: the intersections of race, class, gender, and place in black fathers' engagement and family–school relationships. *Gender and Education*, *29*(5), 577-593.

Pruett, M. K., Pruett, K., Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (2017). Enhancing father involvement in low-income families: A couples group approach to preventive intervention. *Child Development*, *88*(2), 398-407.

Marsiglio, W., Day, R.D., & Lamb, M.E. (2000). Exploring fatherhood diversity: Implications for conceptualizing father involvement. *Marriage and the Family Review, 29,* 269–293.

Påfs, J., Rulisa, S., Musafili, A., Essýn, B., & Binder-Finnema, P. (2016). You try to play a role in her pregnancy': A qualitative study on recent fathers' perspectives about childbearing and encounter with the maternal health system in Kigali, Rwanda. Global Health Action, 9(0), 1–9.

Puhlman, D.J., & Pasley, K. (2013). Rethinking gatekeeping. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 5, 176-193.

Puhlman, D. J., & Pasley, K. (2017). The maternal gatekeeping scale: Constructing a measure. *Family Relations*, *66*(5), 824-838.

QSR International Pty Ltd; NVivo qualitative data analysis software; Version 12, 2012.

Rice, K. K. (2015). The importance of including fathers. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, *2*(3), 232-238.

Roggman, L. A., Noyce, L. K., Cook, G. A., Christiansen, K., & Jones, D. (2004). Playing with daddy: Social toy play, early head start, and developmental outcomes. Fathering, 2(1), 83–108.

Sarkadi, A., Kristiansson, R., Oberklaid, F., & Bremberg, S. (2008). Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Acta Paediatrica*, *97*(2), 153-158.

Scheibling, C. (2019). The culture of fatherhood 2.0: exploring the "tiny public" of dad bloggers in North America. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-18.

Schensul, J. J., Berg, M. J., & Williamson, K. M. (2008). Challenging hegemonies: Advancing collaboration in community-based participatory action research. *Collaborative Anthropologies*, *1*(1), 102-137.

Stefanski, A., Valli, L., & Jacobson, R. (2016). Beyond Involvement and Engagement: The Role of the Family in School-Community Partnerships. *School Community Journal*, *26*(2), 135-160.

Solomon-Fears, C., & Tollestrump, J. (2016). Fatherhood initiatives: Connecting fathers to their children (CRS Report No. RL31025). *Retrieved from Congressional Research Service website: https://fas. org/sgp/crs/misc/RL31025. pdf.*

Tautolo, E. S., Schluter, P. J., & Paterson, J. (2015). Pacific father involvement and early child behaviour outcomes: Findings from the Pacific Islands families study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *24*(12), 3497-3505.

Thanh, N. C., & Thanh, T. T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Educational Science*, *1*(2), 24-27.

Trahan, M. H., & Cheung, M. (2018). Fathering involvement to engagement: A phenomenological qualitative roadmap. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *35*(4), 367-375.

Valiquette-Tessier, S. C., Gosselin, J., Young, M., & Thomassin, K. (2019). A literature review of cultural stereotypes associated with motherhood and fatherhood. *Marriage & Family Review*, *55*(4), 299-329.

Viswanathan, M., Ammerman, A., Eng, E., Garlehner, G., Lohr, K. N., Griffith, D., & Whitener, L. (2004). Community-based participatory research: Assessing the evidence: Summary. *AHRQ evidence report summaries.*

Vreeswijk, C. M., Rijk, C. H., Maas, A. J. B., & Van Bakel, H. J. (2015). Fathers' and mothers' representations of the infant: Associations with prenatal risk factors. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *36*(6), 599-612.

Weitzman, M., Rosenthal, D. G., & Liu, Y. H. (2011). Paternal depressive symptoms and child behavioral or emotional problems in the United States. *Pediatrics*, *128*(6), 1126-1134.

Wilson, K. R., & Prior, M. R. (2011). Father involvement and child well-being. *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health*, *47*(7), 405-407.

Wilson, L. L., & Thompson, J. (2021). Critical Race Theory and African American Fatherhood: Countering the Mainstream Narrative. *Journal of African American Males in Education (JAAME)*, *12*(1), 89-106.