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## Gathering strengths and resiliencies of low-income joint and custodial fathers of color : a focus group study

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Jamil M. Davis  
Gathering the strengths and  
resiliencies of low-income  
joint and custodial fathers of  
color: A focus group study

## ABSTRACT

The low-income father of color has been poorly represented in research studies relating to positive aspects of their involvement as fathers. Researchers have shown that studies that positively reflect the involvement of fathers are often overrepresented by samples of white fathers, while fathers of color are often labeled as absent, non-resident, peripheral, and deadbeat. Current research is beginning to explore the positive qualities of this marginalized group through studies that document the potential for fathers of color to serve as positive role models.

This research gathered data from two focus groups (n=9 and n=5) of low-income African American and Hispanic fathers of color. This study seeks to contribute to the literature by documenting the narrative of 14 joint and custodial fathers of color from New York City. This research found supporting data regarding the existence of nurturing and protective qualities such as, spending quality time with their children and being present physically and emotionally for their children. In addition, these group participant fathers incorporated parenting styles that were protective and directive, which may have been considered necessary living in low-income neighborhoods. This study also showed that changes have occurred in past gender biases in the New York City family court system against fathers seeking custody of their children toward more gender-neutral attitudes.

Future studies that build on this one may find similarities between genders, races and people of different socioeconomic status, instead of focusing solely on qualities that tend to stigmatize and demarcate. As research that supports men of color becomes more available, derogatory labels, and stigma could become a thing of the past, as men search for ways to parent their children in ways that accommodate our multicultural society.

GATHERING THE STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCIES  
OF LOW-INCOME JOINT AND CUSTODIAL FATHERS OF COLOR:  
A FOCUS GROUP STUDY

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Social Work.

Jamil M. Davis

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2009

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous studies geared towards the understanding of positive and negative relationships between a father and his biological children. Various books and research studies are in agreement that the unique nature of quality time spent between fathers and their children assist in fostering healthy relationships along the developmental periods of life. Conversely, they are in agreement that the father's absence may lead to social and relationship issues during later development.

Current parenting has changed since the traditional nuclear two parent headed households to include single parent households. The majority of these households tend to be headed by single mothers. However, there has been a growing number of single parent households headed by men. While this parenting trend has been studied the bulk of research has focused on divorced and middle income white fathers. Fathers of color are usually underrepresented in samples that positively reflect direct involvement with joint and custodial children.

When documenting the involvement of fathers of color, specifically low-income fathers, the topic is usually related to father absence and court ordered child support. These studies add to the stigma already attached to this marginalized group by ignoring success stories. Some research that has focused on joint and custodial fathers of color is taken from the mother's perspective, again contributing to stigmas because of relationship or dispute issues between couples. This study seeks to report on the strengths and resiliencies of 14 joint and custodial low-income fathers of color. By collecting

success stories from two focus groups( n=9 and n=5) of low-income joint and custodial fathers, I will be able to tell their stories of parental accomplishments despite the risk factors usually associated with living in low-income neighborhoods, such as high crime and poverty.

Strength perspectives focus on the positive qualities that enable individuals and groups to persevere. The focus on risks has led to the current prejudice and negative viewpoints that limit low-income fathers of color from being recognized as valuable resources for their children. Collecting their responses to questions about their child rearing practices, support systems, and feelings about larger systems and society's reaction to their responsibility allows these men to tell their accomplishments from their perspectives. They are no longer held responsible for research results that are not representative of their point of view.

My goal is to document the strengths and resiliencies that are often ignored when discussing low-income fathers of color; in addition, to gather information to provide evidence or dispute the racial, socioeconomic and gender biased practices that prevent these men from gaining the respect they deserve.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of a father has transitioned over the decades from a peripheral breadwinner role into one of participatory caretaker of his children. There have been numerous studies and books that show the uniqueness and importance of a father in the function of his child's developmental stages. Studies analyze fatherhood from several different angles including father involvement and absence (Baum, 2004; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Maurer & Pleck, 2006; Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley & Scaringi, 2008; Schwebel & Brezausek, 2007).

A review of the current literature indicates that there is a lack of studies that focus on the positive qualities of low-income fathers of color. Many studies tend to focus on the challenges this population faces that can have an adverse affect on the child's development, such as living in dangerous neighborhoods, growing up in single parent households, and economic challenges due to lack of finances (Hamer& Marchioro, 2002; Eitle, 2006; Cronk, Slutske, Madden, Bucholz, & Heath, 2004; Berrick & Gilbert, 2008). While the studies do highlight some of the challenges these men face, there remains insufficient data on the strengths and resiliencies that are undoubtedly also present in these fathers.

The first section of the literature review below will explore the unique qualities of fathers, in order to provide a framework for this author's investigation into the need for more studies about low-income fathers of color.

The second section will address current societal attitudes toward joint and custodial low-income fathers of color. It will also highlight culture in relation to, the

biases from past studies that influence agencies' attitudes towards this marginalized group.

The third and final section will examine how family courts and agencies whose mission is to strengthen families contribute to bias by placing potential custodial fathers into negative categories, and in some cases, ignoring their possibilities.

This literature review will then be followed by the presentation of group interview data from 14 men in an attempt to fill gaps determined in the literature.

This thesis seeks to contribute to current studies which are focused on the perspectives of low-income fathers of color, build upon current studies that are culture specific and record data taken from a marginalized population whose parenting models may differ from those of the dominant culture.

I am specifically interested in exploring the following question: What strengths and resiliencies do these men possess that enable them to parent successfully? However, responses will be documented whether they support strengths or problem areas faced by the men interviewed. This research may serve to promote services that may not be in place in order to enhance the skills of low-income fathers and assist them in becoming more capable parents.

This study may also encourage further studies that explore success stories of low-income joint/custodial fathers of color. By gathering qualitative data from low-income fathers through a strengths perspective lens, the focus is not on risks, but on solutions custodial fathers can offer. The gathering of stories successful or not, help to depict the reality of these men through narratives that capture the essence of what it is like to be involved in their child's life.

By exploring current models that are indicative of the parenting norms of a specific culture, future parent research can document the caretaking styles of like cultures from parents who have found similar ways to raise their children. It is not the goal of this researcher to discount how the dominant culture influences parenting norms, but to focus on how this sample of low-income fathers of color raise their children, and the valuable contribution this group makes to our understanding of parenthood.

### *The Importance of Fathers*

Fathers employ a unique style of parenting that leads to successful developmental progress in the areas of socialization, empathy, problem solving and higher self-esteem (Pruett, 2000). Fathers do not mother (Pruett, 2000); they have distinct qualities and strengths that assist in the positive development of a child. Dr. Kyle Pruett writes in his book *Fatherneed* (2000) that parenting is about solving problems and the differences between how fathers and mothers approach different problems. The one crucial ingredient in successful parenting that every researcher has shown across race, gender and socioeconomic status, is a loving relationship between child and parent. Comparing genders and cultures when studying parenting skills may lead to researcher bias depending on the personal lens of the researcher.

Goldscheider & Kaufman's (2006) research study stresses the importance of biases and conceptions about single fathers regardless of color that may influence the opinions of researchers:

*“It is important to study attitudes toward unmarried fatherhood as well as unmarried motherhood given the increase in these families and the continued existence of gendered expectations. For example, single fathers may be seen as incompetent if they are living with their children, or irresponsible if they are not, producing a more negative image of single fathers than single mothers. On the*

*other hand, men who do well raising children on their own may be given more credit than women simply because initial expectations are low” (p.192).*

Being raised in low-income neighborhoods has been associated with high crime and unemployment. Cultures have specific differences that should be analyzed and taken into account when studying how people parent. It is possible that income levels and culture influence specific ways that low-income fathers solve problems: these culturally specific ways of parenting are worthy of studying since they add a unique perspective.

Coley (2001) addresses the need to develop practical studies that support and devalue misperceptions surrounding low-income fathers. Stating,

*“One issue concerns the source of data. Nearly all of the previously reported findings were derived from maternal reports, thus representing a narrow and possibly biased view of father involvement. The voices of fathers themselves have rarely been heard, an important deficiency in the data” (p.745).*

One factor that influences the choice to remain a constant presence in their children’s lives depends on the amicability or romance between parents, regardless of whether they live together. Studies have shown that a maladaptive relationship between non-residential fathers and the mother of the child affects the relationship between the child and his/her father. Sometimes called “gate keeping,” mothers who have physical custody of their children may control the relationship between a father and his child. There are also research studies that are based on the responses of mothers due to the unavailability of the father: these responses can also be influenced by the relationship between the two parents (Black, Dubowitz & Starr, 1999; Gavin, Black, Minor, Abel, Papas & Bentley, 2002; Pruett, Williams, Insabella & Little 2003; Summers, Boller, Schiffman & Raikes, 2006; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf & Sokolowski, 2008).

Few studies have focused on the narratives of successful fathers that have been involved with their children either through joint custody or sole custody (Hossain, Field, Pickens, Malphurs & Del Valle, 1997; Gavin, et.al., 2002; Summers, Boller, Schiffman & Raikes, 2006; Dudley, 2007).

The review of that literature has led this author to focus on several themes to document nurturing qualities that embody protective factors for low-income fathers and families. The definition of family has changed over the past five decades. Family is no longer defined as a two parent headed household consisting of a mother and father. The definition has transitioned into families headed by single parents, male and female, and same sex couples.

One of the components to family centered approaches is the emphasis on strengths within a family. Strengths are positive qualities that can be capitalized upon to better serve populations (Allen & Petr, 1998). In order to support these families' strengths, family centered practices build upon strengths that are not only gender respectful but address cultural differences as well. According to Allen and Petr (1998),

*“Strengths come in a variety of forms and may vary by race and culture. Hence, practitioners must be creative and open-minded in their views of what makes a particular characteristic, activity, person, or group a positive contribution to a family's life” (p.11).*

By focusing on strengths instead of risks the researcher's lens is allowed to widen with opportunities to study successes instead of failures associated with single parenting.

#### *Studies about Fathers of Color and their Biases*

In the past, the bulk of studies focused on father involvement contained data from middle class and married samples. *“Thus, there is less information about men who fall*

*outside of these parameters and a greater need to expand the conceptual and empirical base of knowledge” (Coley, 2001). Researchers may also have had limited access to this population. Recently more culture specific data are being gathered. Researchers are customizing present research that is respectful of different cultures (Dudley, 2007; Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley & Scaringi, 2008; Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Crean, 2008).*

There have been studies that address the resiliency of urban low-income African American mothers. By focusing on success stories this population became recognized as a valuable resource worthy of interventions to support their efforts (Brodsky, 1999). Brodsky (1999) states that studies about successes and resiliencies highlight the stories of the participants instead of the researcher’s perspective. Qualitative research can provide real stories that are the antithesis of what the public believes.

Similarly, researchers who have studied low-income fathers of color used to focus more on “deficit approaches” to parenting. In a study by Hossain et al. (1997) the authors write:

*“In many studies African American and Hispanic American fathers care giving involvement has been viewed from the ‘father absence’ and ‘machismo’ perspectives...Such a ‘deficit’ approach has indicated that fathers in ethnic families assume a peripheral role in the daily functioning of the family” (p. 73).*

In addition to mothers over fathers, researchers have focused on Caucasians over people of color. In an article written by Professor Coles in 2003, she writes

*“While the percentage of single father families is small among all races, the proportion of African American single-father families seems to be at least as high as, or higher than, that of white single-father families. Nevertheless, an increasing number of studies continue to focus on the parenting experience of white fathers... Not one has focused on African American single fathers with full custody of children” (p101-102).*

Rodrigo Campos (2008) of New York University writes this about Hispanic fathers:

*“Although recent studies have begun considering cultural and ethnic variations in fathering, emerging views of today’s fathers still largely describe mainstream white fathers” (p.134).*

More recently, researchers have found that low-income fathers of color spend as much if not more time with their children than the more studied middle-income fathers from the dominant culture (Hossain et al, 1997; Coles, 2002, 2003; Pruett, 2000; Summers, Boller, Schiffman & Raikes, 2006; Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008). These reports are helping stereotypical viewpoints to be challenged and changed by empirical research.

Also, some studies prove little difference in risk factors associated with delinquency and substance abuse across ethnicities and social classes for single parents (Eitle, 2006). Eitle stresses the importance of conducting studies focused on single parents across racial and socioeconomic lines. It may have taken awhile to get to this milestone due to, decades of studies that have compared parenting skills across cultural groups, but recent research such as Eitle’s shows promise that parenting studies are becoming race, culture and gender respectful (Roy, 1999; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001; Cabrera & Garcia-Coll, 2004; Chambers, Schmidt & Wilson, 2006; Chui, 2008). By focusing on paternal strengths instead of labels such as deadbeat, absent and non-resident fathers, agencies and programs within diverse communities are able to tailor programs designed to meet a family’s specific needs.

This researcher seeks to contribute to studies focused on the strengths and resiliencies of fathers of color with a sample of African American and Hispanic low-income joint and custodial fathers living in Harlem and the South Bronx of New York

City. By contributing up to date research that focuses on current joint and custodial fathers of different cultures, specific themes emerge that can be built upon to understand how parenting skills may differ among groups.

### *Joint and Custodial Fathers*

Low-income joint and custodial fathers' roles have been severely understudied. There is a need to broaden the knowledge base concerning the function and usefulness of this invisible population (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Coley, 2001; Coley & Morris, 2002). Studies have focused on negative attributes, such as child-support and unavailability. These tend to contribute to pessimistic viewpoints surrounding this already marginalized group (Hamer & Marchioro, 2001). Additionally, Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, (2006) state that:

*“Although popular culture has embraced the idea of fathers as a highly visible and positive force in all aspects of their children’s lives, the image of low-income fathers remains more nebulous and negative. Assumptions about low-income fathers encompass expectations of absence and neglect, resulting in stereotypes about “deadbeat dads” that become codified in welfare reform legislation focused on strengthening child support legislation”(p.146).*

By gathering qualitative research from low-income joint and custodial fathers of color that focuses on strengths and resiliencies, negative stereotypical viewpoints can be transformed as this new information becomes available about this understudied population.

The lack of attention to strengths and resiliencies creates a bias when deciding whether poor fathers are suitable for custody. Coley (2001), stresses for research that will expose the need for this seemingly hidden and misunderstood population. While past studies may not have purposely perpetuated biases by not including low-income fathers



input, they may not be a reliable resource to evaluate involvement. There is a need for studies that directly focus, from the father's perspective on how they provide paternal involvement other than financial responsibility. Coley & Hernandez (2006) stress the need for:

*“...a comprehensive, multidimensional view of father involvement that captures both the nature and the meaning of fathers' parenting. One perspective is built on the developmental needs of children and defines particular components of fathering that fulfill distinct child needs” (p. 1041).*

Distinctive measures such as desire, love and commitment to parenting do not have monetary value. To measure a parent's involvement upon monetary contribution is nebulous at best, given the importance of the relationship between a child and its parent regardless of gender. It has been shown that there are alternatives to parental involvement besides financial obligations such as protection, endowment, socialization, discipline, teaching and caregiving (Gavin et al, 2002). The sample of fathers collected for this research study already financially supports their children. It will be of interest to collect responses on how they utilize their parenting skills to raise their children despite risks such as low-income and living in dangerous neighborhoods.

Researchers Hamer & Marchioro (2001) contend that there needs to be more focus directed on the involvement of low-income custodial fathers. These researchers also contend that services are not as prevalent towards men as they are towards women. Hamer& Marchioro reported on an exploratory study of 26 African American fathers in three areas:

*“The circumstances they obtained custody, the transition from part-time to full-time father and the social supports that enhance or inhibit services. The researchers found that while the first two agendas were factors that contributed to custody, there was a willingness to be in the child's life. The third agenda is what*

*needs to be addressed in current studies and why there are still biases in place that make it difficult for fathers to secure the same services that female single mothers receive” (p.118).*

As social workers, we have an ethical responsibility to assist marginalized populations. The NASW Code of Ethics sub paragraph 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity state:

*“(a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.” (c) “Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion and mental or physical disability.”*

The NASW code of ethics guides professionals to understand how society influences issues that affect oppressed populations and individuals. As researchers we can provide information that improves services for marginalized populations such as the low-income custodial father increasing their self-efficacy with programs tailored to suit their unique needs.

Child welfare agencies, such as Administration for Child Services (ACS) in New York City, are responsible for assisting the overwhelming foster care population. While their primary purpose is to prevent the neglect and abuse of children, they are also responsible for the placement of foster children. There are disproportionate numbers of African American and Latino children within this foster care system. Hill (2007) writes about the statistics of children of color in the New York City foster care system:

*“About one of every 22 black children [was] in foster care, compared with one in every 59 Latino children – and only one in every 385 white children”(p.542).*

Unfortunately, the current situation surrounding low-income families regardless of color involved in the New York City court system is disastrous and is the geographic

focus of this study. ACS is also responsible for assisting family courts with their overwhelming caseloads involving parental rights and custody battles. The agency investigates families before trial to supply lawyers and judges with information that may decide the fate of their families. High caseloads and burnout are associated with the caseworkers employed by the agency. As a result of these conditions, the agency is notorious for bad decisions and fatalities involving the welfare of children.

Family courts and child welfare agencies work in concert to impose bias against low-income people of color. The role that the Agency for Children's Services serves with the family court system can be detrimental to the unity of the family. Parents in New York City know the history of this agency and the power it has to disrupt families' lives. The primary goal of this agency seems to be that parents need to be cleared of neglect or suspicious behavior before seeking to unify the families. What may first seem like convenience for an overwhelmed court system to expedite the numerous cases is a suggestive, stealth—like negative opinion of families who are present in the New York City court system (Hill, 2007).

This disruption and bias may be even worse for fathers who may have the desire to become involved but are not familiar or informed of the proper procedures. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 was enacted to place children with biological parents and provide services to ensure success. As a result of this act foster care agencies are mandated to refer placement of children removed from a parent's custody with their biological relatives. However, although this act was created to strengthen families, the option of including biological fathers is not considered. In fact, there are instances where policies have become ignored by caseworkers when it comes to low-income fathers.

Fathers are often ignored when deciding placement for children for a variety of reasons. Fathers are seen as problematic and in some cases hard to locate due to the implementation of court-ordered child support. Because they fear paying child support and being incarcerated for lack of payment, they are more apt to flee or not become available for their children. This not only inhibits their relationship with their children but they also become unaware of their rights as fathers and in some instances may lose paternal rights by not participating in custody cases. Ironically, child support agencies have a high success rate in locating fathers and can become a valuable ally in locating possible custodial parents (Hill, 2007).

Caseworkers perceive that fathers are not interested in taking responsibility for their children and thus workers are reluctant to contact or initiate proceedings. Harris (2007) writes in her law article:

*“As recently as the early 2000s, child welfare agency administrators told researchers that downsides to involving fathers included the risk of reintroducing an abuser into the home, increasing conflict between the parents, threats to female caseworkers from fathers who had engaged in domestic violence, and the increased amount of time workers had to spend on cases if fathers were involved. The administrators also expressed concern about increased costs of providing services and transportation and fathers creating “barriers to other permanency options.” In addition, caseworkers often perceived fathers as being uninterested in helping their children, an attitude that persists to this day”(p.277).*

Although children clearly benefit from having fathers in their lives, fathers also benefit from being with their children. Professor Rebekah Coley (2001) has written that custodial low-income fathers have higher self-esteem and purpose by caring for their children. Her study shows that the responsibility of being a parent empowers many troubled low-income fathers to strive higher to provide for their children. Becoming responsible for a child seems to have a profound affect on the behavior of new fathers.

Some may see the ways their lives were affected by the absence of a father figure and want to reverse the cyclical trend. Coley (2001) reports,

*“Many fathers claimed that becoming a parent had been a life-changing experience, leading them to drastically cut down on illegal and dangerous behaviors and giving them a reason to live. Furthermore, they saw their children as a means through which they could be more successful. That is, these disadvantaged fathers wanted what most parents want for their children: to do better than they themselves had, not make the same mistakes, and carry on their name and their heritage” (p.746).*

These agencies employ social workers that are bound by the NASW code of ethics. Are they aware of the biased practices that are preventing children from being placed with at least one biological parent? Are supervisors supporting these assumptions that affect the fathers who are willing to step forward and assume responsibility for their children? While child support does serve a necessary purpose, it also becomes a double-edged sword, scaring fathers from coming forward and preventing children from becoming united with at least one biological parent.

With respect to how different cultures parent and discipline their children, this may be the reason that there are a disproportionate number of children of color in the foster care system. Lawmakers Chiu and Dixon write about changes in how the legal system view race and culture seeing as how the American family is more than representative of how one culture views the proper way to raise your child.

In a law article by Chiu (2008), she stresses the need for America to recognize the difference across cultures and how they parent. A big reason for African American children’s placements in foster homes is the amount of over reported child abuse cases. Cultures vary as to how they dispense discipline, as well as, how they parent. Lawmakers should investigate and take into account different ways cultures dispense discipline:

*“The parent-child relationship also feels the heavy hand of another influence - the cultural background of the parents. Culture dictates what are optimal, appropriate, and acceptable parenting practices. What one group accepts may be considered unacceptable or even abusive and neglectful by another group” (p.1775).*

Current laws are influenced by the dominant culture: in a law article by Dixon (2008) she writes about the legal system allowing for changes by adopting an African American Law Act. This act would offset the high percentages of children placed in foster care and victimized by the family court system. One solution she cites is looking for and making use of the paternal rights often ignored by child welfare agencies. The inclusion of cross cultural training at all levels is needed; she states that workers from the dominant culture need to be more aware of cultural differences and structural racism that restrict services to African Americans on the whole.

*“Many African-American caseworkers report that white staff lacked exposure to cultures other than their own and had no context for understanding the cultural norms and practices of minority populations. Cultural misunderstanding by juvenile and family court judges also plays a role in the proportion of African-American children entering foster care. All of these things combine to form structural racism, which both produces and maintains racial inequities in America today” (p.116).*

In summary, by completing this study of joint and custodial fathers, this researcher hopes to challenge many of the biases and stereotypes associated with low-income fathers of color. Additionally, the study can provide information to child welfare agencies that will highlight these valuable men’s positive qualities. By eliciting stories from successful single fathers of color that have persevered despite obstacles considered to be detrimental or risk factors for children, programs can be tailored to meet the cultural specific needs of marginalized groups. Finally, this thesis seeks to encourage policy makers to look at current obstacles that prevent low-income fathers of color from

becoming an arsenal in the fight against high populations of children affected by these biased guidelines.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The research design is an exploratory, flexible, qualitative study that will gather narratives of responses from two groups (n=9 and n=5, respectively) of low-income joint and custodial fathers of color with children under the age of eighteen. The researcher will facilitate these groups using questions and vignettes specifically designed to elicit responses to situations regarding their nurturing qualities. The questions are designed to draw on the skills they possess that enable them to persevere despite obstacles to parenting, such as living in low-income neighborhoods associated with high crime and being a single parent.

#### *Recruitment*

Participants were recruited from fliers posted at churches and through word of mouth from friends and fellow social workers in the hopes they would inform possible participants about the study. The flyer contained the purpose and length of the group interview, compensation incentives, and the contact information of the researcher. Snowballing techniques were also used after several participants were recruited due to an “initial access to a very limited number of identifiable sample members” (Anastas, 1999, p.289). Participants were given the incentive of ten extra dollars if their referral met criteria and participated in the study.

The researcher was also granted permission from the executive director of Unitas Therapeutic Community to recruit clients from the agency, where the researcher was employed part-time (see Appendix D). Unitas is a grassroots, community- based organization that provides free family counseling services to the Hunts Point section of



the South Bronx. The Hunts Point section of the South Bronx has one of the highest rates of poverty in the United States.

The researcher's colleagues at Unitas were informed about the nature of the study during a clinical staff meeting, along with the qualifications for participation in the study. In addition, the colleagues were told the content of the questions in case the fathers they approached were interested but wanted more information. The staff members were also informed that the potential participant does not need to disclose their participation to them if they decide to participate in the group interview. Staff members were given copies of the flyer to give to interested clients who contacted the researcher if they wanted to become involved in the study. In cases where the participants were referred through colleagues outside of the Unitas agency, the researcher was given the potential participants' contact information after they expressed interest in participating in the study.

Upon initial contact by telephone the potential participants were informed about the study and its requirements. The researcher confirmed that the potential participants fit all three criteria for participation. These requirements were: a joint or custodial father of color, their child must be eighteen years of age or younger, and the person must have an income level defined as low. Income requirements were based on the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of low income status, which is 200% above the national poverty level. Because of the high cost of living in New York City, low income was defined as 30% above the national poverty level (130.4%), and the researcher multiplied the national poverty level by 260% ( $130\% \times 2 = 260$ ) to compute the participant's income qualifications. The researcher made this decision based on information from the federal

cost of living index Web site ([www.top50states.com/federal-cost-of-living-index.html](http://www.top50states.com/federal-cost-of-living-index.html)) that shows the cost of living in New York City is 130.4% above the national average. After computations, a family of two qualified with an income not to exceed \$35,594; a family of three, \$44,642; a family of four, \$53,690; and a family of five, \$62,738.

Fathers had a choice of two participation dates, which were January 10<sup>th</sup> and January 17<sup>th</sup> 2009. In total, 14 fathers were recruited for the study; 7 of them were Latino fathers and 7 were African American fathers who met the study's conditions. Eight of the fathers had sole legal custody of their children and six were joint custodial parents. Seven of these fathers were recruited from the Unitas agency. One father was a worker at the "Point" facility located outside the Unitas agency; he was recruited via the recruitment flier. The "Point" is a low-cost after school program that serves children from local public schools in the area. Three were recruited from colleagues of the researcher who told the participants about the study and they agreed to be contacted by the researcher. Three were recruited through snowballing techniques after recruited participants told other involved fathers they knew about the study.

Participants were paid twenty-five dollars for participating and given an extra ten dollars if they recruited another participant that successfully fit the criteria and participated in the study. The participants were also provided with round trip transportation (a four-dollar metro card) if they used the public transit system.

The potential participants were also informed that their responses would be tape recorded and transcribed by an outside source who had signed a pledge of confidentiality. However, due to the unavailability of the transcriber, this service was not used. The

transcription was done verbatim, so the grammar presented is representative of this group of men from New York City.

In order to increase the likelihood of their participation, the potential participants were informed that child care services would be provided by the certified caretakers of Unitas if necessary. None of the fathers recruited for the study requested day care services so this service was not used.

The researcher requested that the focus group participants meet approximately one half hour before the interview process to sign the consent forms and fill out the demographic questionnaires. The researcher gathered demographic information for statistical purposes concerning the age group of the fathers, income levels, length of time they were involved as a single father, and the ages and number of their children. The researcher also asked the fathers to document the relationship they have had with their parental figures in a scaled question from 1= very bad to 5= very good.

The participants signed the informed consent form (Appendix C) after the researcher explained the form in its entirety. Participants were given copies complete with local referrals for free and sliding scale counseling in case the information discussed created discomfort. In order to provide confidentiality, the researcher informed the participants that they would be identified by first name only. This also provided confidentiality while transcribing the data. Participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. They could choose not to answer any question and they could withdraw from the study before the groups began. They were also informed that if they chose to withdraw from the study after it began they would still be paid and their information will still be used. It was explained that once the audio-taped

and transcribed, all participants would be included and it would not be possible to extract individual information. There were instances where fathers became emotional during the study and the researcher was concerned they would walk out. However, the emotional responses added to the richness of the discussion and no one left the group upset.

### *Data Collection*

Each group met for one 2 ½ - hour interview on either Saturday (January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009) from 12 p.m. to 2:30p.m., or Saturday (January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009) from 12 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. The first group consisted of nine fathers; four were African American and five were Hispanic. Three were joint physical custodial parents and six were sole legal custodial parents as determined by the family court. Two had become fathers in previous relationships and were now re-experiencing parenthood as a single parent.

The second group consisted of five fathers; three were African American and two were Hispanic. Two had sole legal custody of their children and three had physical joint custody as determined by the family court. One father left the second group part way through the interview due to a forgotten work commitment. Each interview group was held for two hours. Each group was asked the same questions in the same order to decrease the likelihood of bias.

Before asking the two groups about challenging times that may cause them to become emotionally upset early in the interview, the fathers were initially asked about domestic and nurturing skills they had developed. Each group began with the researcher asking questions about cooking skills and quality time with their children, followed by questions about protective factors such as advice about bullies and warnings about danger in low-income neighborhoods.

After the first hour a ten-minute break was given during the groups. The participants used this break to answer calls, get refreshments, and go to the rest room. The interview continued with a focus on the relationships the participants had with their fathers and finished with a discussion of any positive or negative circumstances they have had with larger systems such as family court or Agency for Children's Services. In the case that the first group answered a certain amount of questions by the two-hour limit, the second group would be asked the same amount of questions so the groups were comparable.

Questions were created to gather information and responses coded according to thematic categories such as:

1. Nurturing qualities: What are some ways you spend quality time activities with your children? How do you play with your child?
2. Protective/strength factors: Living in low-income neighborhoods may be associated with high crime and cause problem situations for children, what advice have you given your child to ensure his/her safety?
3. Relationship with their own fathers: What have you learned from your relationship with your father that you apply to your relationship with your child?
4. Biases inherent in larger systems: There are many instances where people of color and poor people feel as if they are treated badly by the family court, child support and ACS. What kind of experiences, if any have you had?

#### *Data Analysis*

After personally transcribing the audio taped recordings, the researcher reviewed the transcription and recordings again for accuracy. Underlying themes emerged after

reviewing the tape- recorded responses from the two groups, in addition to the original themes created by the researcher. The questions asked were designed to elicit nurturing and protective qualities of paternal-headed families. Questions were also themed regarding the existence or non-existence of bias in larger systems such as the family court and ACS (Agency for Children's Services). Information was also used to examine or disavow the existence of strengths and resiliencies in this group of joint and custodial low-income fathers of color.

Due to the small sample of fathers and specific geographic location, this study is limited to the in depth experiences of these 14 men of the South Bronx, who are in various stages of the joint/custodial process. The study was limited to African American and Hispanic fathers and thus did not allow for racial diversity.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The question asked for this qualitative thesis was: What strengths and resiliencies do low-income fathers of color possess that enable them to successfully parent their children, despite obstacles such as living in low-income neighborhoods, and economic challenges?

Two groups were facilitated using open-ended questions designed to elicit responses to situations regarding the father's everyday life experiences with their child(ren) and some of the challenges they faced.

Demographic data was obtained before the interview began to gather information concerning the ethnicity, age group, and income level category of the fathers. The questionnaire also inquired about the length of time they were a joint or custodial father, and a question about the quality of the relationship they had with their own father and mother. Fathers were also asked to include the age and gender of their child(ren),

Interview questions were asked to provide thematic material in the following areas: decisions to become involved with their children, nurturing qualities, protective factors, and the possibility of biases. The questions about bias were used to investigate the presence or absence of unfairness in larger systems such as the agency for children's services in New York City, the family court, or neighbors and family members.

These four categories were subdivided into different themes to capture the essence of what these men described they faced while raising their children either alone or with the assistance of the mother of their child.

The data were further analyzed to find any differences between African American and Hispanic fathers present for the study, as well as differences between the fathers who had full custody and joint custody. These findings seek to build upon current research focused on the understudied population of low-income fathers of color.

### *Descriptive Data*

Seven fathers identified their race/ethnicity as Latino (n=7) and seven identified themselves as African American/Black (n=7). Four fathers were between the ages of 26-36, five were between the ages of 37-47 and five were between the ages of 48-58. Racially categorized, four Latino fathers were between the ages of 26-36, two were between the ages of 37-47 and one was between the ages of 48-58. Three African American fathers were between the ages of 37-47 and four were between the ages of 48-58. The mean age for all the fathers was 42: Latino fathers had a mean age of 37, and African American fathers had a mean age of 48.

One father was unemployed. One father had an income level of \$5,000-\$15,000. Two had an income of \$16,000-\$26,000, five had an income of \$27,000-\$37,000, two had an income level of \$38,000-\$44,000, and two had incomes of \$44,100-\$57,600. One father reported that he was retired. Therefore, the income levels were evenly distributed across income categories, with most men making approximately \$32,000.

Examining income by ethnicity revealed that, one Latino father was unemployed, one earned \$5,000-\$15,000, one earned \$16,000-\$26,000, two earned \$27,000-\$37,000, one earned \$44,100-\$57,600, and one was retired. The retired father did not disclose his financial situation; this made it difficult to calculate the mean income for the fathers. One



African American father earned \$16,000-\$26,000, three earned \$27,000-\$37,000, two earned \$38,000-\$44,000, and one earned \$44,100-\$57,600.

Six fathers had one child: three were African American and three were Latino. Six fathers had two children: three were African American and three were Latino. Two fathers had three children: one was African American and one was Latino.

*Table I: Demographic Information*

Race	African American	Hispanic
<b>Ages</b>		
18-25		
26-36		4
37-47	3	2
48-58	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Unemployed		1
\$5,000- \$15,000		1
\$16,000-\$26,000	1	1
\$27,000-\$37,000	3	2
\$38,000-\$44,000	2	
\$44,100-\$57,600	1	1
\$57,000-\$72,170		
Retired		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Number of Children</b>		
One	3	3
Two	3	3
Three	1	1
	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

Of the 24 children, 9 were male and 15 were female. The children ranged in age from 3 to 18 years with a mean age of 12.4 years old. The Latino fathers children had a mean age of 10 years old and the African American fathers' children had a mean age of 16.8 years old.

Two Latino father's stated that they were a joint or custodial father for less than one year. Two fathers, one African American and one Latino, were joint or custodial parents for 2-3 years. Two fathers, one African American and one Latino, were joint or custodial fathers for 4-5 years; and eight fathers, five African American and three Latino, had been joint or custodial parents for 5 years or longer.

Six fathers rated their relationships with their own mothers as very good, two were Latino and four were African American. Three rated their relationships with their mothers as good, one was African American and two were Latino. Four rated their relationships with their mothers as okay, one was African American and three were Latino: one African American father did not find the question applicable.

Four fathers rated their relationships with their own fathers as very good, one was African American and three were Latino. One African American and one Latino father rated their relationships with their fathers as good. One African American and one Latino father rated their relationships with their fathers as okay. Two African American fathers rated their relationships with their fathers as bad. Four fathers, two African American, and two Latino, did not find the question applicable.

Eight fathers had sole legal custody of their children obtained through the court system, one father had joint legal custody obtained through the court system, and five had joint physical custody that was established by the parents themselves.

There were interesting dynamics which some of the fathers brought to the study that highlighted some of the challenges they face. In the first group, one father figure was a grandfather who was retired, wheelchair bound, and had legal sole physical custody of his 8-year-old granddaughter. He is currently involved in a custody battle with her birth

parents. He had been raising her since she was 4 years old. Another father in that group was the sole legal custodian of twin 17-year-old boys; he also had children from another relationship. One father had recently been awarded sole physical custody of his two young girls, 8 and 4 years old.

The second group was comprised of a widower who had raised his daughter “now 16 years old” alone after she battled depression and was hospitalized for almost a year at the age of eleven. One father was the joint physical custodian of a daughter born premature who was learning impaired. Another father shared custody of his son with his hearing impaired and developmentally challenged ex-girlfriend. These men told about their positive experiences of larger systems, such as the Agency for Children’s Services (ACS) and the New York City family court system, which brought hope to the fathers who were still in different stages of the joint or custodial process.

### *Salient Themes*

#### *Decisions to become involved*

What situation caused you to seek or take joint/full custody of your daughter/son?  
*“Stepping up to the plate”*

Six fathers spoke of situations, some tragic, and others where it was necessary for them to step in and become involved. All responses contained a theme of being available for their child.

“Well in my case, the death of my wife, you know that gave me full custody of my daughter, you know what not, and, um, I had to go through a whole of mess and what not because other people in my family wanted her, you know what not, but I took full responsibility you know because that’s my daughter, the birth certificate got Donald on that birth certificate, my whole full name and everything you know, so I took that responsibility and I wasn’t letting no one take that responsibility.”

“She’s deaf, she’s a bit you know, um, mentally she’s like a child, know what I mean, shes like a child, you know she could act like a grown up but mentally she’s a child, you know that’s her and uh, and its something that I learned to love her with, like again I don’t like to judge, we do have our ups and downs bumpy roads but then that’s me too, cause if I have love for you then I can not hate you. You know we had our beautiful moments and all that, do I hate you, despise you, no, we could work it out I could do the best I can, you know I’ll do the best I can not to leave the wrong impression or wrong image in my sons head to his mother or towards his mother you know what I mean,”

“Well just what they have been through, what they have been through just to be there for both, situation they have been through with the foster home and with their mom living with their mother, you know certain conditions at the time... just to be the responsible parent or the communicative parent or the supportive parent.”

“She called me one time crying and saying, “ you know daddy I got to get out of here” and I remember I was laying on the couch, sick as a dog I was sick as a dog it was a Sunday night, and I went and got her and even though a couple of months later she went back to her mother, we got everything ironed out, you know, she knew without a shadow of a doubt that I had her back, she knew without a doubt I had her back and then when everything was settled, the dust settled she was totally comfortable with me, I never bad mouthed her mother or any thing like that but that’s the thing I had to let... I had to build a case, I couldn’t go to court and say well her and her mother are not getting along, *next!* I had to build a case, I had to build you know I had to get you know things from the teachers, school proof you know that this was happening and it wasn’t easy but you know that’s the way I approached it and that’s what happened in my case I had to you know get a big body of work and that’s what I got.”

“My daughter comes up, Dad could you watch her for an hour or two, that’s my grand daughter, O.K. fine, let me go take the kid for an hour or two, hour and two, didn’t see my daughter for about 3 weeks, I’m saying but during that whole time, I’d say you’re going through it you are probably still going through it, you guys that’s new to the neighborhood. I’m looking at my grand daughter, not my daughter now, not my son, my grand daughter. Oh shit, how am I going to give this girl a bath? Without being accused of something wrong, this is not my daughter. This is my grand daughter, you know I’m looking at family members, I’m looking at the father, I’m looking at every body, What do I do? The kid was only supposed to be here for an hour or two. Now the child is 8 years old. I’ve taught that kid everything she knows, and I love her.”

“My wife, you know left the house, and she abandoned me, you know left me two kids, she took the little one when she was about four, I don’t know what for, so I let her go, but you know, now sometimes I want to see her, you mean I can’t see her, so we gotta do something.”

The theme that resonated throughout this section was that these fathers inherited sole custody through tragedy, abandonment, or neglectful practices from the mother. The ways they obtained custody were through perseverance with the court system and vigilance, as opposed to a mutual understanding between the mother of the child and themselves.

What kind of relationship did you have with your father? What did you wish was different with your father? How would this have made a difference in your lives?

*“I always wanted my father”*

As noted in the demographic section four fathers did not feel their relationship with their fathers was applicable to the study and two fathers rated their relationship with their fathers as bad. These less than positive experiences left many fathers speaking about having a void in their lives with the absence of a father figure:

“My relationship with my father uh, its pretty fair, I love my father every time I look in the mirror I see him um even though I have 2 siblings, there’s 3 children, my father left me left our family when I was two. So uh, but I still learned from him, I learned about respecting my talent, he’s a musician, a writer, very skillful um you know and I just admire the way he is at this point now he’s 72, types like 80 words a minute, he knows the computer, like in the 70’s worked for the New York Times, but all of those codes that you see inside of the computer and everything like that he knows how to put that in manually on the keys, he’s very intelligent, very literate and he talks a lot, I learn a lot from him even though we seldom speak but I do love him, I tell him that I love him when I see him, I’ll kiss him, I’ll hug him and I’ll kiss him on the cheek, you know he’s my father.”

“We lived in the projects and you know my mother put him out, and I was devastated you know, I was devastated you know, I wanted to tell him so bad that I love him you know, I wanted to hold him you know, I wanted to hug him I wanted to tell him man that I’m proud to be his son, but I never got the chance to do those things because he died I was about 17 you know when he died in the 70’s, you know, and he never got to even see my first daughter. You know and I was really hurt, you don’t know growing up in the projects and see other people with their fathers, families together and I just had my mother and my brother and I was devastated about that. Because I always wanted my father.”

“My father was killed in a car accident in 1965 I was like 6 years old. So my memories are very limited but you know if your drinking and driving, you taking a chance—he’s in the car with 5 other people, he crashed on the Grand Central Parkway. He was killed, nobody else had a scratch, so I was always as a teenager saying you know, you son of a bitch, you know you left me I don’t have a father, you know, and you’re looking for father figures you’re looking for advice, you know when I become a father what model do I follow? But the one thing he taught me if he didn’t teach me anything else, the one thing he taught me was you don’t fucking drink and drive. And if that was his purpose, I learned that lesson, cause I don’t drink and drive.”

“My father—I learned he was always working, I never had that quality...once in a blue I’d go out with him or something, cause I grew up with 5 brothers from different mothers, they mothers would treat me different you know, but he was always working, you know I got mad at him sometimes because he was never around.”

One father spoke bitterly about his biological father and still seemed to harbor that resentment although he was raised by a nurturing stepfather:

“Like my son he would turn around and tell his sister you know dad taught me one thing, don’t ever abandon your kids. Regardless what it is, my stepfather he has always been my father, the SOB that biologically got my mother pregnant was never in the picture, my step father raised me since I was 3 years old. He passed away, but he taught me always depend who is bringing the money in the house, take care and whatever happens it’s always been the mans place to straighten it out.”

Fill in the blank, the message I received from my father regarding parenting is?  
The message I send to my children regarding parenting is?

*“I watched him; I always wanted to be like my father.”*

Five fathers reported learning about parenting and providing for their families from their fathers. They now have this message to send to their children:

“Well my mother passed away 20 years ago, and he was left with us three, me, my sister, and my brother, so, and he never remarried, he stood there by us it was hard for him, now I’m going through something and I’m like dad, how you did it, and he said. ‘Son, it was hard for me because she was not there, I could not reach out to her’. ‘God took her away from me, at least yours is still here, you got hope, you could still reach to her.’ So I told him, ‘But pa because I’m going through some heavy shit in the house, because she is not there no more after a twenty - year marriage she is not there no more.’ So he is like, ‘take it easy.’ But me and

my father now we got like a real bond, than when we were younger, because now I'm starting to appreciate my father more. Cause he's there now and I'm doing that with my kids now."

"I had a great relationship, what he did for me I do for my girls. Cause he didn't show me anything negative. Whether he did this whether he ran numbers, he was always there as a father. He was always there checking my homework. He was always there telling me you know what I mean. I don't know what it is to get a beating, I don't know what it is to go hungry, I don't know what it is to struggle, so that's what I know. That's what he taught me and that's what I give off to my girls."

"I knew what he was doing, he was bringin that money in. Now I know as I'm a parent, I understand, I'm kind of feeling the same way. I'm always working, its always night jobs, I'm doing stuff like that."

"Anything I know about being any type of parent came from my father, from watching him, he used to build stuff in the house, build bars that he used to work in the back yard with. I watched him: I always wanted to be like my father. I always wanted to be the guy that went out and came back and paid the bills, and cook the big piece of chicken, that guy."

"By example they're going to find out what is going to happen. Everything that's how my father taught us, he told me and my brother you going someplace 'Stop arguing in the back, put your seatbelt on.' Me and my brother would not listen 'Oh. Dad he ain't nothing.' We driving and he stops...eerch, boom, we would bump our heads, the next time we would go somewhere first thing we would do put the seat belts on, just like smoking, I tell my kids the same thing, like my oldest son, he smokes marijuana, he smokes, you know, cigarettes, whatever. My twins they are in my custody they don't smoke, I don't smoke, my father killed me (laughing) he caught me smoking he said, you know by example cause at his age, his day, 'Oh you wanna be a man let's go smoke a real cigar, like a real man, gave me a cigar, puffed it, it made me so sick I never touched another cigarette til this day.'"

Three fathers received messages from their fathers by *not* being in their fathers' lives.

"Mine is pretty simplistic the message that I got from him and it wasn't a spoken word message but its just the way the situation was, be there for your child. Because the worse thing you could do is not be there for your child. And the message I send to my daughter, when she eventually has children, be there for your child and make sure whoever the father of those children is there for their children and so on and so on because a child as quiet as its kept, a child needs both parents."

“The message my father left for me, for me is the opposite, I want to do the opposite of what he did. You know I don’t want to leave my children, don’t want to be absent from my children. I want to show my children love. I want to give them dignity you know I want to give them understanding, but most of all I want to give them respect, I want to do for my daughter, you know and show her respect and have love for her kids.”

“I can’t tell you about the father part, but I could tell you about the child part. The child part is you know, you’re coming out of your own personal pain and your experiences your journey and your life. Now you have another offspring and I can not talk for all of us but, we are smart enough to know that our fathers were here and they are gone, but we have morals and we know what is right and wrong, we have to, there’s no I guess, have to stay with mine because in this era so dark, I want to leave a legacy to my kid. I want my son knowing he still walking in a good footprint, like they say when shit hits the fan, he knows, God willing he knows what to do.”

Before becoming a joint/ custodial parent what were you expecting? How has that changed now that you are an involved father?

*“I took a class; I took a class for that.”*

The greater part of these men took the responsibility of becoming an involved father because circumstances created a parental void in their children’s lives. These fathers spoke of having to undo and repair the pain that caused them to become involved. They also spoke of having to assume some responsibilities that their society does not associate with fathers, such as doing hair and being in the kitchen.

“I didn’t want the negativity to be there so it was basically a lot of talking making them understand, you know me and your mother are not together but we both love you and we just want to make sure we do things to not be a single unit but like now I explain to them you got two houses, you are at your mother’s, and you got another house here with me, you know it’s just like that with me.”

“I took a class, I took a class for that, but like I said being a parent for me once again it’s a blessing, especially when you have kids whatever the best thing for me is seeing the innocence of a child. And you see that innocence of a child when you come home and you’re assed out, excuse my language gentlemen and you come home and you get that hug. Like I said before, sacrifice, like this gentleman here, you go and you sacrifice your time and you take that class.”

“I didn’t know what to expect starting at 43, as really a parent um... paternal parent, didn’t have much experience, like raising a child on my own. But um, I



just sort of like... what's changed is more like responsible, what I expected to be was responsible, like I needed to be more responsible uh as far as like having a child, as far as making sure she was safe, rearing her teaching her things and stuff like that what's changed is me being more in the kitchen, changed for me trying to figure out how to do her hair."

"... I'm going to have to do certain things in about a year or two to help my child, because I could basically see I could see it coming, it was like something inside of me said, 'You know what, start positioning yourself.' You know I lived in New Jersey, I loved it where I lived, but I got to go back to the Bronx because, there's some stuff I need to do, you know and it's not about me its about positioning my child so she could have her best shot. So I always looked at it like you know, I know what I need to do, I need to position myself so when the storm hit, I was in the position to take care of what I needed to take care of."

"What I was expecting was a challenge for me you know cause I knew in my circumstances, cause I was going to be both parents, you know so I knew it was going to be a challenge, some times it was going to be difficult, cause I was never in this situation before to play both roles and I was just wondering how I could do the best I can, you know and love my child man, be there for her man. Whatever thick or thin, whatever the case might be, that I'll be there for her, and I won't let her down no matter what."

"You have to wake up every day with a shield and a sword and just block it and just look at it sometimes. Oh my God, I couldn't believe this happened but it can happen, so you have to be prepared every day until this day you still got to be prepared and that's the best I could tell you. So I can not say how can I be prepared...or describe to you how well prepared. I could because that's not the way I do, I do things the way it comes to me. That's the way I can deal with it. Cause if things change around us like that and I could deal with the change then I have to deal with the unexpected."

### *Being an Involved Parent*

What are some of the rewarding aspects of being an involved parent? How does it make you feel to know you are there for your child? What is the normal day like at your home with your child?

*"You know so I'm here for you."*

Fathers spoke of "being there" for their children. Overall, fathers spoke of their most rewarding aspect of parenting—being the children's academic achievements, and the value of education. Fathers of older daughters spoke about having an open line of

communication to teach them about pregnancy prevention, AIDS, and the pride they felt being a part of their children's lives.

Rewarding aspects. Three fathers of girls spoke of the children's educational achievements as the most rewarding aspect of being an involved parent:

"She graduated school and when she got up on stage, graduating from high school and she said the speech cause she was one of the top students she said in her speech, 'Thanks dad because I could not have done it without you.' And her mother was right there she looked at me with so much anger, and the thing about it that was real was, my daughter lived with her mother, but other than that that was my reward."

"With me it was um, when she graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade and, I'm sitting there and, like she won all these awards and, she won like the spelling bee for her school. Two consecutive years in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and competed in the New York City-wide spelling bee and, to see her get these awards you know, cause I can't spell for nothing man, thank God for Microsoft word in there, spell check, cause a brother can't spell you know, I'm not a good speller, and she um... she excels, so it's like you said ,you just feel so proud, like *man* you know she did it, I'm like thank God you know, and you cherish those moments."

"For me this was my greatest reward, my daughter went to St. Josephs and when she was graduating from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, going to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in high school, my greatest reward was my daughter got the valedictorian award for being the most outstanding student of the year. Mind you now, when she was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade she had depression and she had to go in the hospital. They thought my daughter wasn't going to make it; as a matter of fact they were getting ready to expel my daughter out of St. Josephs because she was out so many days. But the end was so beautiful, when she got that award, the principal was crying, all her classmates was crying, I was crying, my mother was crying, all the people that didn't even know my daughter was there at the graduation was *cryin*. It was the most exhilarating, most beautiful moment in my entire life."

Two fathers of sons also spoke about their children's achievements in school and the benefits of watching them succeed:

"My rewarding aspect is my son received a letter and this was some time in the middle of the school year, sometime last year, and he was also invited to a ceremony. But we were invited to the ceremony just to look at something, but there was a moment when they called him, we got surprised. 'Perfect attendance', they called my son, so my son he got up he just, oh my God, he goes to the stage. Anyway he goes for it and he was up there, his friends too, and they were all

happy because you know... we didn't know that they were going to get involved in the event that we was invited to.”

“This week the mom calls my son, she's like, 'how are you doing in school' and my son says alright, she asks, 'are you getting seventies, eighties?' He says, 'No Ma I'm getting nineties, ninety fives.' She says, 'What?' He says, 'Yeah'. She thought because she was not there anymore there would be no effort, but now I'm putting more effort in it. Cause I'm pushing it to get those grades up, you in the eleventh grade, this year is gonna count, but that was her, the grades were gonna go lower because she was not there.”

One father stated that speaking to his daughter after his wife left the family, and becoming more involved with her was his most rewarding aspect. He also spoke about how their relationship has changed to where he could speak to his daughter about personal issues such as AIDS and pregnancy prevention:

“Well I know now that I have a better relationship with my son, then my daughter. Me and my daughter when mom was home it was hard for me, now she's being more open, I tell her you know I'm here for you, she told me, 'Well poppa you were always working, we never seen you like that mothering part.' I was always there, but mom was taking care of this part. Now I'm here and I'm taking care of mommy and poppy's part. So I told her we sat down we were talking about boys. I told her, 'you know use rubbers, AIDS you know that's it, your life, I can't help you there, you get pregnant I could help you there, anything else I'm here for you'. She says, 'You never talked to me like that'. I was like, 'Sweetheart you know you're 18, I can't control your instincts you know, so I'm here for you.' You know she was uncomfortable talking to me about that, I told her, 'Ma don't you know we'll be talking more.’”

One father spoke of being there to nurture his premature newborn daughter who was born with physical and mental challenges:

“But the most rewarding thing I was there when she was delivered she had a swelling on her head and everything, the second person that held her was me. After the doctor, and I was just whispering in her ear, 'daddy', you know calling her, we knew her name you know, her own sister named her and[saying] her name in her ear and she was in an incubator with jaundice and everyday when I visited her I had my hand inside the incubator, with my gloves on, I'd be touching her and holding her, she knows that first voice was her father, talking to her, you know telling her that he loved her and everything like that.”

One grand father spoke of the pride he felt when as he was addressed by his granddaughter as daddy:

“I was taking her to her mother’s house and I was going back to my apartment and I was in the middle of the street and she yells out, ‘ Bye Daddy.’ I turn around and say, ‘Ok baby bye,’ because she don’t think about me as being grandpa she thinks about me as being daddy. Just like you said you don’t have to give them luxury, the thing you have to give them is a little understanding and love and attention and then when you need to punish them you have to punish them.”

Fathers spoke of preparing themselves for the challenges of parenthood that included many duties they were not solely responsible for when they were involved with the mother. The next section of the findings help show how these fathers incorporate the necessary nurturing aspects of parenting to feed, clothe, and spend time with their children.

*Nurturing qualities.* Fathers were asked about their nurturing qualities in an effort to gather how they cooked for their children, incorporated shopping and laundry into their daily routines, and also spent quality time with their children.

Do you have cooking skills? Did you have them before you became custodian to your child or did you have to learn? How did you do this? How do you incorporate shopping and laundry in your weekly routine?

*“Growing up watching my mother, so it comes naturally.”*

### 1. Cooking

Overall most fathers spoke of having had a female influence to teach them the basics, and after cooking for a period of time their basic instincts took over. Most of the fathers had been in intimate relationships prior to being solely responsible for their children, and they shared the responsibility of cooking with their former spouses or girlfriends.

Six men noted what they learned from women — mothers, relatives, and ex-wives:

“My mother did a lot of cooking so I picked up a lot of skills from her.”

“I learned from watching my moms and my son’s mother, cause she let me know she was not one to be cooking everyday.”

“I learned from my mother, my aunt’s down in Virginia and actually I learned some cooking skills from my ex-wife also.”

“I learned how to cook from watching my mother and I’m still learning as I go, they want something to eat, I go to the supermarket buy it and basic instincts kick in.”

“Growing up watching my mother, so it comes naturally. You know you have a child, or any child you’re raising or anyone or guest visitor you’re gonna cook something for them, you know? And it makes you feel good, you know, like you’re the host. But it still does come naturally, like it’s mandatory. You have to pass that on to the next one. So now what are you going to be doing? Opening up cans of Chef Boyardee forever?”

“Yeah, me, umm, I grew up with my mother and my brother. My mother did a lot of cooking so I picked up a lot of skills from her. Then, I went into the service and I became a cook in there. I got the skills outta there, which helped me a lot.”

One father learned from his brother.

“Me, I...um...I learned basically from a sibling, my brother, who was a cook in the military.”

One man noted he tried to learn from his father, but was unsuccessful.

“I tried to learn from my father, I know how to do some things but you know like the rice, cause you know like the rice and beans, so I told my Pa, ‘Yo Pa I want to learn how to do this.’ But you know, he’s like 68, I don’t know how long he’s going to be around. You know everything else I could deal but the rice and beans, you know.”

Fathers also spoke about how hard it was coordinating cooking with parenting but seemed proud of themselves for the accomplishment.

Two fathers stated:

“It’s hard to prepare a meal and you get home at a certain time, and I know when my daughter gets home from school, I like to have meals ready. Sometimes I ain’t home at that time; it’s kind of difficult. I don’t have a hard time making food, you know, I only eat a few variety of things anyway.”

“I’ve taught my daughter some things. She knows a couple of things. It’s never really been an issue. The issue is getting home the time I do and then trying to cook a meal.”

One man learned some things from his daughter (who learned from her late mother):

“My daughter knows how to cook cause my wife was a good cook. She taught her a lot and she knows too. And, she taught me a lot of basic skills. You know, that I didn’t know, so it’s kind of good to have a good relationship part in the kitchen when you’re cooking.”

Five noted that they learned when they had to learn, because of their responsibility to their children. One learned late in life.

“But it’s better at a later age; I understand it better. And, my child loves me, she knows who’s cooking. Between versus mom versus dad, I always got the meal.”

## 2. Shopping

Sole custodial fathers of older children did the food shopping alone and did not mention taking their children. Joint custodial fathers adjusted their shopping routines according to the visits with their children, and ate out often, which was convenient for them. Fathers also spoke of being affected by the high prices of food, and spoke of how it influenced their shopping for food.

Three sole custodial fathers stated:

“I’ll definitely do, like get the penny saver for the weekend special because I stock up, I got a freezer so when I see chicken on sale that week, stock up on chicken, or wait til next week when I see a sale, stock up, have enough for a year just frozen food. Wrap it up, freeze it, with that I’m pretty good.”

“I can’t do no shopping here in New York, you gotta go all the way to White Plains to Wal-Mart, where a gallon of milk is only cost three dollars and two cents.”

“I basically go to the supermarket, get the bags, and then I call on the phone. She [my daughter] comes downstairs and she has to heave them up the steps. And, you know, that’s on her – I sit there and watch.”

One joint custodial father spoke of changing the way he shopped because of the economy and adjustment of being single again:

“I do the shopping but now you know with the economy I don’t do it as much as I...you know like all at one time, I do it like in spurts. I’ll get something for dinner, breakfast and then I’ll go like two days later, like that, you know not like I used to and spend like \$200 in one shot.”

One custodial parent of two young girls stated:

“I live with my mother and she shops for the house with the girls, I enjoy taking my girls out to eat, because after a hard day at work I don’t want to cook, we go to the Chinese restaurant almost every day, they always eat the same things anyway, chicken and fries.”

### 3. Laundry

Most fathers who had custody of older children felt the children had to be taught responsibility and autonomy. Fathers spoke of having children washing their own clothes to teach independence. Fathers of older sons tended to have them do their own laundry in contrast with fathers of girls who did not seem to mind either doing it for them or doing it together. Custodial fathers had more responsibility for the children’s clothes, while joint custodial fathers spoke more of only being responsible for their own laundry.

Two African American sole custodial fathers of older sons stated:

“I get my kids to wash their own clothes. If it piles up I don’t change it. Cause I’m not washing your clothes no more. I am separating their clothes from my clothes; I don’t even want their clothes to be mixed up with mine because their clothes are just a totally different type of dirtiness. You see when they get older they never wash their clothes.”

“You know like I’ll run out of something and then I gotta go. My son, I’ll let him do his, I’ll give him some money, let him wash his underwears cause I don’t want you taking no more of mine.”

Two joint custodial fathers who did not care for doing the laundry stated:

“Laundry, I have a bad habit of doing it when I run out of clothes.”

“For me, I can’t stand the laundromat. I been through that so many years as a young man, so at 48, I like to use the washing machine inside of the house and I hang dry. I do not supply the laundromat with the quarters. To afford to be drying the stuff like that is ridiculous at this point. So, basically, I wash everything, you know, my daughter, she has – anything that’s not clean, you know? I let her know, whatever, and make do with what it is. But I do it for the comfort of maybe being home on the weekends, or if I find time in the evenings to run something in the machine and hang it – I hang everything all over the house. I think if I had a line that went outside of the window, honestly, I’d probably throw it out of the window. But I’m on the first floor, so basically, you go in my house, I got one whole room [where] I just hang everything. Just throw it up and let it hang dry.”

Two fathers of girls noted:

“You do everything for your kids you do everything, everything, everything and in the long run maybe that’s just my opinion, I think they lose a little respect for you and they expect everything for them. So it’s kind of hard for me bringing up two girls when I gotta take them a bath or do their laundry. I have an 8-year-old girl and I have a 4 ½-year-old girl, I’m bringing up two girls by myself and you know I do everything for them, I do everything for them except wash their underwear, they wash their underwear by themselves.”

“Most of the time we do it together. And now the thing is, where, ‘Dad, you gotta wash your stuff, I gotta wash my stuff.’ Used to be we would do it together. Now, since she done got older, she wants to do her own, and I do mine.”

Two other fathers spoke of establishing a collaborative, teamwork effort. This created learning opportunities for the younger children who were not quite ready to wash clothes by themselves.

“Cause I do the laundry myself. I always see whites more than colored clothes a lot. You know, I’m like, what’s going on? And then when I get to his socks, I say, ‘How come I got more socks than you?’ I tell him the socks you can wear once, because that’s your feet. It’s a learning process for a child, so you have to have patience – show ‘em the ropes, the steps, certain steps, not putting pressure, or yelling at him what to do. He don’t know what to do yet. You have to show him and instruct him what to do. Then you have a team player there.”

“I tell her, ‘You sort the clothes. I take them to the laundry, do what I gotta do, and when I come back you fold them up, put them away and we good to go.’ You know, we do like a combination thing. I mean, does she know how to do laundry? Yes. I’ve taught her, her mother taught her, so she does know how to do laundry. That’s how we do it, so this way, you know, it doesn’t become like a chore.”



One father spoke of wanting to keep things the same since his wife left and not having his son think things have changed since his son's mother was not around anymore:

“I try to take care of it, I do it in my house... he's 16 he'll be 17, I could say for me, he has other things to worry about than clothes, I want to continue that thing when mom was there, that when he comes his clothes was always clean, I want to continue that, I don't want him to think that things are different, they are because mom's not there.”

Another father spoke of how his 10-year-old son learns from what he sees him do in the house and the pride that it makes him feel:

“I have my son now, cleaning his sneakers, cause he's into that age now growing up and I know naturally as a father and experience and a human being I know when you get to a certain age, you're growing up, so uh I remember one time he asked me, 'Dad can you clean my sneakers?' It's like a little thing now, he's 10 now, you know, as he's getting to 10 now he started doing it on his own. I caught him a couple of times in the bathroom, I said, 'What are you doing?' 'I'm just cleaning my sneakers, you know this girly I like.' This and this and that, I don't put no pressure on him I say, 'hey go for it man. Make sure you don't wet the floor or nothing.' Cause you gotta keep that child motivated, cause he's already doing something on his own already.”

#### 4. Quality Time

What are some ways you spend quality time activities with your children? How do you play with your child?

*“Being a parent equals sacrifice.”*

Fathers of younger children spoke about doing activities that involved an educational aspect; these fathers spoke about doing activities at home with their children that did not involve a lot of money. Fathers of older children enjoyed time with them but spoke of them becoming more autonomous and wanting to spend more time with friends.

One father spoke of doing things repetitiously, using video games as rewards and sacrificing:

“I got two girls so it’s a little different see. So what I do that video game stuff I use that video game stuff as a reward. Me as a parent I have a different opinion, I think that that video game stuff it takes time away from you, what I do is like my girls we do a lot of libraries, do a lot of museums, walks sometimes, you know sometimes I don’t want to, it’s cold as hell outside, I’m like lets go pick rocks outside in the park. As a parent you know being a parent is like bending over and sacrificing, because being a parent equals sacrifice. So I do a lot of that stuff I get a lot of passes from the zoo. You pay for a pass about 180 dollars, I’ve been to the zoo over, I can’t tell you how many times, I can tell you every corner of the zoo there is. I feel that once again this is my opinion, you don’t need to spend money to have fun as a parent. As long as there’s love and there’s sacrifice let’s do it, you know like this morning, they with their moms they are with her four hours a day every Saturday, so like 7:30 this morning I had to read three books, I’ve read those books three thousand times, you know its just a lot of things you do as a parent man.”

Two fathers spoke of not having to spend money by spending time in the house:

“I like to spend it inside the house and I work on other things like her behavior, or how she is, or reading, or um drawing like, she likes to write and stuff like that so analytically I try to educate her, on far as skills like that or maybe she might watch a videotape or something like that, um but the best time I have is to stay inside.”

“When we are home we do puzzles, you know I love puzzles, she goes along with me doing puzzles, play on the computer you know. She likes cartoons, you know I got no other choice than to watch cartoons with her you know and it’s good.”

One father spoke about how the loss of his wife affected him and his daughter’s relationship in the beginning, and how it has changed now that she is older. In addition, two other fathers spoke of how the relationship with their children had changed since the children became older and are involved more with their friends:

“It was harder in the beginning with me and my daughter, you know, the loss of a mother is tremendous on a child at 8 years old, you know, and I had full custody, you know, it was real hard in the beginning but as she got older it got better and now our relationship is like we have gotten so close and its beautiful, we try and do everything together, she don’t want to go the movies with me no more but that’s O.K. I can understand that you know she wants to go with her friends now. But our relationship at home its beautiful man we watch T.V. together, we sit down and do her homework together, I go over her homework with her, we could read things together. Most of the time we are watching the history channel and that is so beautiful man.”

“My relationship with my daughter right now she’s 16, she’s changed so much! So I had to change as a parent, she’s no longer like daddy’s little girl, she’s daddy’s girl now. So you have to learn how to share her with her friends, you have to deal with the whole process of dating and the tug of war with me is. I had to stop looking at her as a little girl, that I used to change the pampers and I had to look at her as the young lady that she is and understand.”

“Every other week I used to take my kids to the movies, or somewhere to the park or something, since they got older, I don’t exist. My 10-year-old, basically whenever I go to a pool, out anywhere or when I don’t have to go to work sometimes, I take my 10-year-old with me. But you know my 10-year-old, he’s with me on the weekends, he’s with me all the time, at home we watch T.V. there are a lot of T.V. programs on cause it is too expensive to go out.”

One Hispanic father went with his young son on school trips:

“I like to go with my son’s school on trips and things like that, I work at night so when they need volunteers I go with them, it’s funny because I’m like a big guy and most times I’m the only man in the group, but I have fun with the kids though.”

One joint custodial father spoke of having his three children decide what activities to participate in on their weekends together; he felt that it was important for their quality time to be centered on his children’s preference rather than him deciding what they all should do in advance. He believes this leads to autonomy by allowing the children to take part in the decision making process:

“When we get together we try to plan out things we are going to do prior to me coming over, it may be a movie or it might be video games, things of that nature but we always try to plan things out ahead of time. I want them to have the opportunity to choose what they want as opposed to me just dictating to them.”

One father used his time to bond with his son and get out of his neighborhood so his son will learn to venture out to other places when he becomes older, increasing his son’s awareness to other activities that extend past the stoop of his building.

“I let my son grow, you know, so when he wants to do something or not, when I want to do something I won’t tell him what I want to do. Like I say if uh, I come out the day before and I want to take this kid to the museum, I won’t tell him nothing I’ll just say come on let’s get out of here, you know we’ll walk and at the

same time as we walk, you know we're still bonding, we're bonding as we're walking to the train station or the train station to the museum, blah blah blah we're bonding you know and it's a good thing that he sees me moving, traveling cause when he grows up he is not going to just come out and stay in front of the building."

When it came to positive experiences most fathers spoke of unique times with their children that would otherwise never had happened if they were not involved parents.

Two Hispanic fathers stated:

"We all have in Spanish macho, we have machismo inside of us, so what it does, it feeds my ego and it makes me a better man and it makes me stick out my chest, that I know I don't have to go to mommy, I'm not going to sit here, so it brings up my bravado, and it gives me that swagger when I walk in the street and I got a little bop to my step, and whatever it is, you know what I'm saying, I could braid hair, I didn't know how to braid hair before."

"I worry about if I get custody of my daughter how do I do her hair? Cause every year, I don't want to go through that for nothing, she knows how to take a shower, she knows how to brush her teeth, she comes out knows how to dress. But you know my concern is the food and all that, that gets there, the love I'll give them love, mommy's love I can't give it, mommy's love is special, but her hair that's what I worry about, how to do her hair."

Two African American fathers spoke of turning negative experiences with their daughters into positive experiences:

"The negative experience I have with my daughter is mostly her complaining about a lot of her friends and sometimes things that she does wrong in school, and I really have to discuss that with her. Most of the time we have a positive relationship, things is good with us. Or, we could talk with one another and she don't hide nothing from me, that's the most thing I want to get her to understand, don't hide nothing from me, anything you do, even if it is wrong, confront me and tell me."

"With me every negative experience has turned out to be a positive experience, because I've learned from it. Being a mistake that my child has made, or being a mistake that I have made. I always try to learn from it, cause she's gonna make mistakes you know. I'm the child's father I'm not her mother so, I was never a little girl, so I don't understand a lot of things you know. It's just me doing this so... she's receptive most of the time, but when we have a very positive experience I carry that for as long as I can."

One father spoke of the pride he feels with his daughter:

“You know what the most beautiful thing for me is on Sunday morning when I go to church and my daughter looks at me and says, ‘Dad, I love to see you in a suit and tie, you know, I love to see that.’ And I feel so good when I walk out that building with that suit and tie on, like you said, when you caught with that suit and tie on and people look at you, *wow man* that looks real good! And that shows man, where I’m at you know, in my life, and what I’m doing in my direction I’m going, you know, it’s the right direction. I want to give a good, good, view for people when they look at me.”

### *Fathers as Protective Factors*

Fathers were next asked a series of questions to gather information about how they protected their children from danger and negative influences in low-income neighborhoods. Two themes that emerged from the responses included advice for their children, and neighborhood support systems. Fathers also shielded their sons or daughters from the harsh realities of growing up in low-income dangerous neighborhoods by providing them with their past and current experiences. They entrusted their children to make the right decision if and when the opportunity presented itself.

Fathers were also asked in what ways they felt they had an advantage or disadvantage over the mother by being an involved father. Some fathers in this study stated that the one advantage they had over the mother, was more patience, and better listening skills, which they felt brought them and their children closer together.

Living in low-income neighborhoods may be associated with high crime and cause problem situations for children, what advice have you given your child to ensure their safety?

Street smarts. Fathers of boys not only had concerns about bullies, but also having their sons targeted by the police. Three fathers of older boys spoke about their experiences:

“What I try to do with my son, you know he’s 18 now, but when he was younger as he was coming up, I try to teach him the pitfalls of the negativity in the streets and the positive. Pick your friends carefully you know, you see somebody doing something wrong, you get some distance between you and them. You know things like that. If your friends are not going to school and things like that, you don’t want to be around those types of people. If you see a fight breaking out if you at a party, get outta there! Don’t stand around being nosy to see what’s happening, because that is when a gunshot will hit you right in the head. You know just little things that you hope he will make the right decisions whenever it comes up to it, so he’ll know what to do. And also how to speak to cops, if you get stopped for any reason be courteous, you know you might not like it, but don’t act like a knucklehead. Have them try to call me as soon as you can or whatever make some contact with me and I’ll be there for you.”

“Like you were saying the low-income neighborhood is kinda like dangerous and crime and stuff. I have twins they always been straight “A” students, always going to the best classes, everything, and they always been good, well mannered, everything. I always told them if you ever get stopped by the police, they ever say you did something and arrest you, don’t say anything, call your father, and it happened. Last year, my kids were in the building helping one of their cousins move, police grabbed my twins and said they were trespassing, arrested them, and then they are sixteen years old. I called civil liberties union to find out the procedures on the... you know they are minors. They are not supposed to be held in jail for 72 hours. So, I had to explain it to the officers, the officers say they could be held, we charging them as adults, they put them on some short[nonsense], they kept them in jail three days, trifling, they basically scared the hell out of them, everything I said to them it came back to them.”

“My son the other day he was walking home with some girl, the cops stopped him you selling drugs and all that. One thing about it is the way you dress, he said, ‘You know Pa they stereotype, they think cause you over here you coming from the projects.’ Sometimes the police they study the neighborhood also, so you got your middle and lower income families living in the South Bronx. They’re building new homes everywhere you look.”

One father, who had been incarcerated, spoke of how he felt—that hiding the harsh realities of drugs and weapons in the street from his young children was not the answer. By showing and teaching them right from wrong, he felt his children would make up their minds whether or not they wanted to participate in that type of life:

“I put it out there, if there’s a gun on the shelf, you know drugs, I put it out there. Cause it don’t make sense, you know, trying to hide stuff from your kids and they gonna grow up regardless wherever you at, and you know see people doing

wrong. So I just try to put it out there for them, you know, like I let them know it's wrong, but it's on you whatever, and you grow up."

Fathers of young daughters spoke of ways they taught their children about molestation and how to physically protect themselves. Three fathers stated:

"I tell my daughters, 'You can't trust no man meaning with your private parts, with anything.' With me they sit on me, because that is my daughter, and I'm like 'Whoa'! Still there is the incident where she's walking down, this kid comes from behind her, and he [fondling motion] so she turns around, and boom, boom, boom, but the thing that was when I saw the tape, dude, the kid was on the floor. I'm like wait a minute this is like a serious situation, and I felt bad because as a parent you feel bad because you teach your kids, and they learn from you, but at the same time too, I get there and the father is like *Arrrrgh*, and I'm from the streets yeah, but I try to keep it harmless because I got kids, so I kind of felt bad cause I taught her that, and she comes home and she's sticking her chest out, and she's like 'I did it poppa.' So I took it as wait a minute, this is something a little more serious, like [I] went to the school afterwards and I apologized to the kid. I apologized to his father, I felt bad, I got girls man, but I gotta teach them you know, that's my girls, you know, no disrespect because we are all men here, but I tell her, 'What are guys good for, nothing! What do guys want from girls, vagina!' I don't know if it's right for me to say that because Shorty was going down he was already Riga Mortis-like [stands frozen]."

"Man you know I got a 3-year-old daughter, you know, and she is more like, you know playful, she's young. But I always I start from young, her mother you know I tell her nobody is supposed to touch you, you know things like that, stay away from people that look scary, you feel uncomfortable just walk away, but I always make sure, even to my son you know, nobody is supposed to be touching you, private parts you know, it's hard to talk about I can't stand that, you know, it's a big issue in America, you know what I'm sayin, you got a lot of pedophiles you know, people right next to you, you know. So I talk that real hard, you know what I'm sayin. I don't trust nobody!"

"I teach my little one I'm gonna teach you how to take a bath, always remember what I'm gonna tell you, 'If I can not touch, nobody else is supposed to touch, and anybody touches I want to know. So backside private parts you wash that, I'll help you wash everything else', and this was when she was three and four."

One father of an older daughter warned his child to be aware of her surroundings when she is in public, by educating her about the economy and other children targeting their peers for their valuable belongings:

“My daughter, her birthday just passed the 27<sup>th</sup> and I bought her a new iPod, and I told her, ‘ Look, I know you have a new iPod, you gonna be in the train, she’s 13, you gonna be in the train, you gotta hold it down because, the economy is not doing good, a lot of kids be out there trying to rob other kids, you really gotta hold it down you know and just stay aware, whenever you be in the train riding in the middle of the car stay next to the conductor, you feel unsafe just get off the train, talk to the conductor or clerk, you know, and the main thing stay aware all the time.’”

Fathers spoke about the advice they gave to their older children on the importance of regular contact via cell phones. Three men stated:

“I tell my son when he gets out of school, you know, call me. I bought you the phone you know it was not for your friends, I brought three phones when you guys come out of school call me, when you get to school you call me. If you can’t do that then I’m taking the phones off. You know, cause I want to find out if you’re O.K.’ The other day my daughter had an asthma attack in school, they couldn’t get in touch with the mom, so they got in touch with me, they called me. You see I told her, ‘that’s what the phones are for sweetheart.’ I did not have to work so, boom, I went to the school right away.”

“I always try to tell my child to, um, my child to, um, like go straight to the bus in the morning, she goes out of the house in the morning, go around the corner, I always tell her when you get to the bus stop call me, when you get on the bus call me, then when you get downtown to school call me, I know she’s at point A, B, and C and she’s in school. Then after school she has activities, when you get to the activity call me and then when you are on your way home call me, cause that’s what I do, the fact that I do it, wherever I’m at, kind of forces her hand to do it, because you know how kids are you want then to do something the first thing they say is well you don’t do it. But I do it anytime I deviate off from my normal course or even during my normal course.”

“I understand school respect, I understand that kids there to learn and I understand cell phones can be interruptive but in the position, my position, I want to school my kid and my son to don’t use it when you have to but use it when you need to call me or just for trouble that’s what it’s about but if it’s for that you in class, the teacher yells at you, you better hold that thought. You call me when you out the class or out the school, Dad I think there two kids there’s three kids, you call me, that is the safety call I need to have.”

One father provided his daughter with a safe environment and tried to ensure that there were not any negative elements such as drug or alcohol use surrounding her:



“With me, with a four-year-old girl it’s more like time I get to spend with her, like I said, usually indoors or something like that as opposed to... I just make sure that she’s around a safe environment, inside no drugs or alcohol, not to say that I’m doing drugs or anything but I make sure that that’s not going on, I’m not around certain individuals and stuff like that to heighten that sense of insecurity.”

Another father used the media to make his son aware of the dangers and consequences and stated that the past experiences of his family members served as a negative example for his son not to follow:

“My son you know I’m lucky he ain’t really a stupid person, but he’s seen a lot of experiences from my family that happened in the street life and I’m grateful cause at one time, I didn’t want him to watch a lot of things and what he did he watched a lot of documentaries like Alpo, Ray Corprett, Guy Fisher all them drug dealers and what he did, he seen the glory in it for a minute and then he seen the disaster at the end. Cause you know everything dressed up at the beginning and he seen when there life went from sugar to shit. That really discouraged him from wanting to be a street cat.”

Could you tell me about support systems in your neighborhood that protect your child/children from these risks? What are some of the ways you get help from family members, including the mother of the child?

Fathers spoke of having neighbors and the neighborhood watch out for their children. They used their neighborhood supports to ensure that their children were provided with a safe environment when they were transitioning from school to home. Other fathers noticed how people who may have been involved in illegal activities in the neighborhood respected their family, and how their personal interactions in the neighborhood modeled good communication techniques for their children. Three fathers responded:

“For the most part I have pretty good neighbors and I have my landlady that lives downstairs and if I’m not home, I can always call her and ask to go upstairs and check you know on my daughter or she knows, you know there were a couple of times when she forgot her keys she gets home and opens the door you know she forgot, my landlady will let her in and you know she went home and you know she has friends in the neighborhood and I always look out for other people’s children you know and other people now look out for my child. Its kind of like a

reciprocal thing, like if I know its kind if odd for this child to be out at this time of night I'm going to question it or if I see them walking down the street with people that don't look right, I'm gonna question that and people do the same for me."

"Like me also I got a pretty secure building, you know the guards in my building they know my daughter quite well, all the maintenance men know my daughter you know because we've been living there for a while, they all know my daughter. One of the maintenance men, you know, he knew my wife real well so they all look out for my daughter you know real well, all my neighbors on my floor look out for my daughter you know most of the ones that know her they look out for her and, I got a neighbor underneath me and her daughter and my daughter are best friends so anything happens my daughter could always go to her house, my daughter stays down at her house anyway so you know we got a good relationship."

"I know my neighborhood for 42 years, since 1967, a lot of people still there that dwell there, being a sixties baby and raised and being named A.B. every knows A.B. within this whole sector of my neighborhood, so as far as my daughter being outside—whether she's not with me, or she's with her grandmother "my mom", or she's just like having fun with friends out there or little kids stuff like that everybody knows, everyone knows who she is, I feel secure that people know me and I'm talking about the majority of people."

Two fathers of daughters spoke about how their interactions in the neighborhood taught their daughters how to intermingle, and also about how they received respect from the community:

"I live in Harlem, so I took her over to my block and she sees how I interact with my people, she asks questions you know why I speak different, than I do when I speak with her as far as I talk more slang of course with my friends in the street. I don't talk like that I don't say the N word around my daughter you know stuff like that, but when I talk to my people it's different."

"I mean you are walking with your daughters and guys they are out there making their money or whatever and they see you with your daughters and they stop and they let you pass by."

The experience of growing up in low-income neighborhoods combined with street savvy provided these involved fathers with experiential knowledge to pass to their children. The children listened to advice and watched how their fathers interacted with

others around them, which provided the children with a positive model for how to interact in their communities. Fathers not only told their children how to survive negative situations they showed them that socialization in the neighborhood provided them with a sense of protection needed in low-income neighborhoods.

Being raised in low-income neighborhoods makes parents aware of bullies and dangerous elements in the community. In the next section, fathers described methods they utilized to provide a sense of safety for their children.

Let's say you have just come home from a long day of work and you are exhausted, dinner is not ready and your child tells you about a situation where he/she was bullied what would you do? Have there been any instances where they were bullied? What did you do, or not do, that you wished you had? What have you learned from your experience?

*"My first natural instinct is to always make sure that I deal with her situation so that when she has a situation she'll come to me."*

Fathers' Responses to Bullying. Fathers were able to tell stories that actually happened to their sons and daughters, and they spoke of the value of listening and providing a sense of calm after their children were confronted with a dangerous situation. Most fathers responded with advice and were able to turn these situations into learning experiences. The African American fathers were less emotionally expressive than the Hispanic fathers, who spoke with zeal as they shared their experiences.

Two Hispanic fathers of boys taught their sons to protect themselves physically, but only after assessing the situation and seeing that there was no other alternative in their opinion. These fathers stated:

"The first day of school a guy picked up his chair and he fell on the floor. The kids started laughing at him in the lunchroom so I told him, 'How big was the guy; was he a big guy do you want me to go to the school?' He says no, 'I'll go to the school and I'll talk to the big guy.' You know I'll take my son to the school,

whatever, I'll take the next step I'll go to the school. They became best friends, now the guy and him are buddies, he comes to the house, watches T.V. So I told him, 'You were bothering my son.' He says, 'You know I was just joking.' My son, he tries to play it cool but I tell him you are going to see a lot of stuff out there a lot of shitheads, you gotta keep focused, just focus you gotta get out of high school go to college. Whenever you see a bump in the road just focus on school, there's going to be a lot of shit out there. I tell him everyday focus, focus."

"The bullying, my son because school is where most of the bulling is done most of the time and I tell him man like you know, kid touches you whatever you hit back. But not necessarily all the time you know, you tell the teacher and the teacher don't do nothing and the kid keep going it's a wrap man! I'm gonna teach you where to hit him in the nose, in the throat or the nuts, I'm not an artist but I'm gonna show him where it hurts. And I bet they will never bother you again you catch them in the nose. I mean I'm 28, my daughter is 3 and I got a 6-year-old boy, I put the gloves on them man I taught them early, I'm a do it rough with mine. I'm a guy you know, like I've been in the street most of my life I ain't had much you know."

One African American father of an older daughter spoke about the value of providing a safe space to listen and be present for his child. He stated:

"I had that problem happen to me not too long ago, where my daughter and a couple of her friends got jumped, come home from school, um, same thing you know I was home, dinner wasn't ready and, um, soon as she came in she was crying and went and told me the situation what happened. So you know the first thing I did was, I said, 'Look we gonna sit down and we gonna talk about it, did anybody get hurt, was... did the police come, did they take anybody's names?' Cause that's what I want to know cause they take anybody's name I might have to go to the precinct anything, she told me, 'They didn't take anybody's name, nobody got hurt.' Then I asked her what was it about. They stole her friend's cell phone you know they just took it a bunch of girls, bunch of girls did this you know jumped her jumped her friend took the cell phone, and nobody got hurt. So I said, 'Well did your friend call her mother and what not?' They reported it stolen; the police came and reported it stolen and we talked about it. I said, 'Well there's nothing you really could do, the police got it now, you know just calm down and what not. You know the situation is going to be resolved... you got to remember when you walking in the street, y'all can't be talking on the cell phones you know.' So I explained to her what it's all about because people snatching cell phones like crazy now, so we discuss it and everything and once I got her calmed down everything was cool cause she was so tense and excited."

Fathers' children were not only the recipients of being bullied, one African American father spoke of how he dealt with finding out his son was the bully:

“I got a ten-year-old, he’s the bully. And I used to think the kids were bothering him and I used to say fight back you know. Come to find out he’s the one beating the kids up in school. So I thought that he was going to get beat up so I sent him to karate school. That gave more problems; I took him out of karate school anyway. I’m dealing with it now. I’m using you know little things like if you don’t start focusing more in school I’m gonna take away everything I got for you, you know everything, you know he got the electric guitar, he got the Wii. He got everything, everything a kid wants, and I’m still dealing with that he has to go to counseling now.”

In what ways do you feel you have an advantage over the mother being a joint/custodial father? In what ways do you feel it is a disadvantage being a joint/custodial father?

*“I teach them whatever I’ve learned, whatever I’ve been through.”*

Fathers employed an authoritative style of discipline. They were firm in their disciplinary measures regardless of the sex of the child. By taking away privileges and setting limits the majority of these fathers were effective non-threatening disciplinarians with favorable results. Fathers of younger children spoke of dispensing discipline and setting limits, while fathers of older children listened to keep the lines of communication open.

Fathers used methods such as good listening skills and their experiences growing up to teach their children, regardless of gender, about respect. The overall theme was that they did not want their children to make the same mistakes they did. By providing their own stories their children could learn from their fathers’ examples.

Two fathers stated they had an advantage over the mother of the child because of their patience, which the mother of the child lacked:

“I have the advantage because I’m the person that has the open line of communication and the open line of communication is bi-directional she hears me and I hear her which is something that her and her mother can’t do because her mother has never been a good listener, you know she wants you to hear her but she don’t want to hear you. So the fact that I’m able to, um, communicate with her, have an open line of communication, and hear her and treat her as a person,

you know, that gives me a tremendous advantage but the down side of that is sometimes you know kids try to take advantage of that. So I have to let her know that I'm not Disneyland dad there will be some rules and regulations here too. So you know sometimes you can't be too nice either you have to be... you have to teach them respect, you have to teach them rules so it's like a very delicate balance."

"I have an advantage just being me, not being angry, you know not being bitter, I believe I opened a line of communication with the sibling... but uh, it's a little bit different with my baby daughter because me and her mother is not together so uh, in that I have an advantage when we communicate or we do get a chance to speak or be together."

One father, a widower, spoke of not having to compare his role to that of the mother:

"For me the advantage is all mine, you know because I play both roles you know I'm mother and father you know so you know I gotta put everything in balance I gotta be father and I got to be a moms. You know, what not, so I'm doing both roles."

Three fathers spoke of the advantages of being from the streets; their own experiences provided their children with lessons about growing up that could prevent them from making the same mistakes their fathers had made. These men did not compare their roles with the mother of the child:

"I had an incident a couple of weeks ago, she's very articulate, I try to teach them like my man right here, from young you know, I had it good when I was growing up I was the only child growing up and I had a good childhood. I ran the streets I always liked money, most like everyone does I didn't think that I was supposed to do what I did and I had the luck of the Gods. I have never been to jail and I don't look at anybody different."

"Like me, I said my children are 3 and 6, I start early, catch them early, everything man, life period! I teach them whatever I've learned whatever I've been through."

"You need to explain to them, this is the result if you do this and this. O.K. now if you continue it and this happens now I'm gonna kick your little rear end, right now I'm just going to explain it to you. They are gonna test you, they gonna test the waters no matter what it is you gotta show them a little responsibility a little love but most of all you gotta teach them street knowledge. You got a lot of little

hoodlums out there, it's not their fault, O.K. that their parents did not give them the attention that they are looking for.”

One father defined his role as being the strong parent to his son by setting limits and sticking to them, as opposed to the mother of the child changing her mind after attempting to enforce discipline:

“As a father I have to be strong, I have to be strong. There are some times that uh, I can't say yeah all the time. I have to say no and then I have to stand by that, you just can't say no, no, then an hour later 'alright let's do it,' cause then as they grow up they gonna wait til you surrender, they used to that attitude of you going no and O.K. I'll wait an hour until she comes back and she says go ahead, they used to that. But as a father you have to maintain that image if you want your son to grow up as a man, and understand you as a man, you have to not to get verbally abusive or not to be abusive, but you have to maintain that attitude to maintain that level voice, you know even though it's gonna hurt you, if it's going to hurt you, you walk away, walk away go to the bathroom you have to go like that then come out at least don't break down or feel bad in front of him that's your weakness, they could sense weakness quick.”

The next section of the findings chapter focused on biases the fathers may have faced from larger agencies and systems put in place to assist families. They were also asked about their experiences with neighbors, family members, and school officials.

#### *Bias from Agencies and Court Systems*

Fathers were asked questions to share about their experiences with larger systems in New York City that had been shown in the literature to be unfair to people of color and low-income families. Their responses provided a major finding in the research; these fathers shared that larger systems were more welcoming to fathers than in the past. Many fathers shared their past experiences with these systems and spoke of the changes. Some fathers had a longer history than others with the family court system and Agency for

Children's Services (ACS); they spoke about the changes they have witnessed throughout their involvement with their children.

There are many instances where people of color and poor people feel as if they are treated badly by the family court, child support and ACS (Agency for Child Services). What experiences, if any have you had? Can you remember any time that you may have felt discouraged by these systems? Tell me about those times. Can you recall any time during the process of obtaining joint/full custody when you felt that your race or gender played a part in it? What are some of the ways, if any, do you feel the larger systems treat men and women different when regarding joint/ full custody of their children? Does the legal system treat people of color equally? What would you like to tell those people at those agencies about your experience?

*"They actually provided me with a lot of help, hey I could do this I could do that, basically telling me everything that I want to hear, all my rights, I never got that before."*

All fathers responded to this question and shared their experiences with family court, child support and ACS. There were some fathers that were angry about their past dealings with child support and the family court system. Overall, these same fathers stated that since they have been involved with larger systems they have seen dramatic changes in these systems. Some fathers shared recent positive experiences that empowered others in the group that weren't that far along in their process, and made them feel they would be successful, provided they were prepared. While speaking about ACS, only three fathers had dealings with this system and spoke about how this agency needed to restructure its policies regarding investigations and responses to telephone calls. None of the fathers spoke of being targeted specifically as men of color but rather as men.

Child Support. Three African American fathers spoke of their recent positive experiences with the child support system to achieve success at negotiating their child support payments:



“I had experiences with the court since 1984, 1985, over child support issues and money and stuff like that, custody, I think from 1980 to 1996 the women just been had a man locked in one category, you a absentee father, you a deadbeat, you know the women said this and they go by that. The last court case I went to I won, it was for child support and I seen there was a stack of papers like that. I got papers going back to the 80’s. Court papers, never won one case, finally I go up there they say does the kid go to school I show them the papers from the teacher, how about the health care, I got some medical things from the dentist every thing that came up, I showed him I had a folder, the kids birth certificate, everything! Pictures of him going from small and then the judge looked at the wife and said, ‘Um, I see what he’s been doing for the last 20 years, maam what have you been doing?’ First time I ever heard that, never heard that, he’s been doing his half what have you been doing for the last 20 years, have you been trying to find a job? Hey you took them to the park I mean, she came there with nothing, she took me to court, I felt so bad cause of the way the judge was constantly getting on her, he said you know you could get child support from this woman, I don’t want child support from her and he said, ‘Look maam we can help you get a job of you want to do something for your kids, they are part your responsibility, you ain’t out there trying to find a job for 20 years, you have not found a job!’ I was like whoa! The judge just got into her.”

“I had a good experience in the child support court actually, recently last month, whereas, I held my reserve and I was quiet and I was respectful and didn’t speak until I was supposed to speak. Which in some ways is not good because you are dealing with a system that’s trying to control and but on the other hand, I had an assertive adversary who was there and she did not let this man speak, this judge or this magistrate speak and he told her to leave the room. He told her, ‘Look, get out.’ You know he gave her a couple of questions and she wasn’t listening and he was trying to ask her questions and he was like, ‘Look get out of here, get out of my room, look.’”

“I go in there as a black man, you know the first time I went in there, the judge won, the next time I went in there I won. I knew how the game was played, you know and I knew what I needed to show him, I needed to show him that I was a better man than he thought I was O.K ., and that is when the system changed for me. Cause he looked at me and he said, you know he’s not typical, you know cause let’s be honest that’s the way I feel about it. They look at us like *typical black man here we go*, but then when I turned it on and I dug deep inside of me and dealt with a lot of different things and did more, overextended myself, then when she tried to be greedy and get more, that’s when he told her, ‘Listen, you shut up I want to hear him.’ And that’s when the whole thing changed... so... but I think coming in it’s like this thing you have to deal with, so I don’t know if it’s because we are people of color it’s just a tough thing. Because you know what I know a lot of people that are white, but I don’t know if I felt related to them on this level. You know and I’m being honest, I know a lot of people so I can’t truly

say, 'Yeah I know a couple of my friends that are white and they, and they, had this experience.' I had one friend for 40 years that's dealing with this process but you know, he hasn't had to jump some of the hurdles that I've had to jump because the mother of his children is in such a bad way that a lot of things are going his way period. Everything being equal I don't know, I think it's hard for a man period."

Family Court. Fathers responded differently from one another to this question, the majority spoke of recent successes, while a few spoke about bad experiences:

"I'm sitting here and I got a different story to tell, I went to court and there was a lady judge and I want sole custody of my girls so, I'm sitting here, I sat there, I didn't go with no lawyer. What helped me was that, sat down I left the apartment the agreement was, we conceived our girls there and respect the apartment where I left you. Long story short, like they say the body wasn't even cold and there was another dude in my house already, fine whatever it is I sat there with the processing man and I sat there confident and I got a different story to tell because I believe in the system. Because I'm a prime example I got sole custody of my girls. So what it was they asked her one question, one question they asked and that was, 'Do you get along with this man?' And the chick was like, 'No'! The judge smiled at me and looked at her and said then how am I supposed to grant you split custody and it was music to my ears, she was like I grant you sole custody. Guys I almost shitted on myself. Cause I'm sitting there not believing in the system so of course everybody has their thing but I'm gonna tell your ass my experience, I believe in the system."

"They actually provided me with a lot of help, hey I could do this I could do that, basically telling me everything that I want to hear all my rights, I never got that before."

"I think that they are giving you more information; they got pamphlets in there to read and comprehend. You could learn a lot about your case. You know with out having to sit there and talking to a lawyer or whatever but you can also run by a lawyer and see where you stand in a situation you know. You could learn a lot they have a lot of information for you."

"Yeah I think it's more important now because as men we are starting to understand that we really do have rights, cause at one point you just automatically believe *oh, I'm not with the mother she automatically got her kids*. So I think now there's a lot more out there for us to get educated on."

Only two fathers spoke of being stereotyped by child support as deadbeats and feeling powerless by the family court system. However, these same fathers spoke of the differences they saw in systems that were more “father friendly” now:

“See when I went about 10, 20 years ago, I was deadbeat. I ain’t get no information. Now I’m going there’s a lot of information, a lot of flyers, it’s not about the mother, it’s about the parent. What’s the best interest for that kid, it don’t say mom, it says the parent, it’s there, there’s a lot of information out there.”

Another father spoke of his past and recent experiences with his child’s mother in court:

“I was going to court all last year, against my daughter’s mother and, um, basically anything I had to say to the judge was dismissed. I mean you know, I mean the fact that I had a felony that came up also, that didn’t apply to the case cause the case was straight up about, um, just accusations that her mother made against me, they’ll stick automatically, and then you’re living with scum bags in the eyes of the judge and you can’t get that off of your back at all.”

This same father also stated:

“I was going to court with my daughter against her mother back in 1996, you know what I’m saying. When my daughter was first born, her mother didn’t want me to be in my daughter’s life, and again, I said I was going to court last year and I see, there’s a lot more information out there than there was when I first went.”

Administration for Children’s Services (A.C.S.). ACS is notorious among low-income neighborhoods in New York City for unnecessarily investigating poor people’s families, and in some instances, placing children in foster homes. In a city that unfortunately suffers constant news reports about child neglect and abuse; the slightest infraction may cause this agency to become involved with a family. Three fathers in this study have been affected by this agency and shared their experiences.

Two fathers, the first a Hispanic father, spoke about how one phone call to ACS can alter a family’s life:

“They need to fix those systems, the ACS I mean. Know there are so many things out there, so much and you know, so many because society, cause you know

sometime you got a good family, beautiful family and then you got ACS knocking on that door. That is called disturbing, that is something that I have gone through. And, um, I'll sacrifice myself for the family if I have to, so I don't care if they, um, they could come out and judge me. That's all they could do best, judge people, because I could call and say I have a neighbor that's doing this, and this, and that. They are not going to come and check me out, why I called, they are going to, they are going to go straight to his house, 'Listen, we just got a call and this and that.' He could be watching T.V. with his child. I just ruined his life, now he has to go through all this, these drug tests and these other sessions because of one individual, you know and these systems need to stop doing that, that's why I had spoken to one of the ACS workers and I told them that ,um, what is it that you know people ,um, the complainer could get away with it and the other has to suffer. You know there are some things called pranks you know."

"I dealt with that, ACS and child support. ACS I dealt with whereas the mother, she actually has a case with ACS, whereas one time she hit her teenage daughter and her daughter at that time said I'm going to call the police, and she did. So there was a point where my daughter and both girls were taken into the system, foster home."

One father spoke of the suspicions of an ACS worker when he was being investigated for custody:

"ACS was going to go asking her information and they keep pushing and pushing. My little girl she's real smart so she turns around and she says, 'Grandpa he tells me in my room.' [I said,] 'Well what happened?' [She said,] 'I can't tell you, cause it's bad,' and she keeps on and keeps on she says, 'Oh he makes me read a book.' But then she says that's not bad, she says, 'He doesn't work, he doesn't work you know,' and she keeps running and running and then all of a sudden the ACS worker is waiting for her to turn around and say that I do something bad. And she turns around and tells the ACS, 'Oh no, in the end after he makes me read the book, I don't tell him what the book is about, he makes me go back and read it over.' The ACS was just so focused to hear that little girl say that I touch her or I get in bed with her or whatever. You know, and that's where they focus cause of the fact is that I be listening to the news. Mother throws child in garbage cans, stepfather molesting children, you know it's constant. A lot of negatives going on in the community, you got ACS coming around and they trying to throw a child to say something... that's not true."

What, if any, has been the societal response to you as an involved joint/custodial parent? Have you noticed any response in public to you being the primary or joint caregiver? Have you noticed any responses from your children's schools? What have been your relatives'

responses to your decision? What would you like people to know about your most memorable positive and negative experiences being a single father?

*“People watch us!”*

Fathers were asked this question to support or disavow the bias that suggests that fathers are not involved parents. The fathers’ responses supported the fact that they are viewed by others as doing something special for their children instead of being the responsible parents they should be.

### *Society’s Response*

Three African American fathers spoke about how the responses they receive alternate between shock and disbelief to an over appreciation for being responsible for their *own* children:

“I get two responses, and they are very different. The one response is it’s a very special thing that you are doing. And I’m saying *why is it special that I’m taking care of my child, that’s my child, that’s what I am supposed to do.* That kind of like pisses me off, because I think right away you think I’m doing my child a favor, I’m doing what I am supposed to be doing as a father. O.K. and then you have the other people that are like, they don’t believe, nah, nah it can’t be. Something must have happened with the mother, you did something, why is it that you are a suspect, before anything and you know because the way society looks at us.”

“I could feel it when I go out with my daughter and go anywhere, you know people be like really eyeing me. But the school system at first they gave me a hard... ‘Oh, you doing it you raising your daughter.’ They was like, really unbelievable, you know are you really doing this, you really raising your child, you really...you a Black man and you paying rent, you buying food, you know, you taking care of clothes and what not, you doing all the responsibilities a father is supposed to do, like they couldn’t understand that. You know, *Yes I am doing this! I’m doing this, I’m raising my daughter!*”

“Even now dating out there you meet different women and it’s weird; you think that women would understand, *O.K. you going to spend time with your kids,* but it’s like sometimes they don’t even understand that. It’s like, damned, he’s going to spend time with the kids, I’m trying to spend time with him, and it’s like a disconnect.”

Two Hispanic fathers spoke about the positive responses and support they receive in the neighborhood:

“From the families in the neighborhood, I got support from my neighbors they know because they question, ‘I don’t see Mrs J. around and I don’t see the baby around and they say God bless you, don’t worry no problems, be strong.’ Even in work, I get support.”

“I live around the area so, you know people, they notice, so there’s certain things, I live two blocks from here, in a house with my moms and my daughters. Another thing, you get a lot of looks from women man, seriously, I’m not trying to be funny, but when I’m out there walking with my daughters, *yo!*”

One grandfather in a wheelchair spoke of the negative response he gets from society as a physically challenged involved parent:

“In the beginning when I first got my granddaughter, I got nothing but negative outlooks. Because nobody looked at me, like I said when I got here and I respect you for it I appreciate you looked at me, but no matter what you all looked except the exception of whoever came late. You know, when I walked in the first thing that everyone looked at was this chair and it’s nothing against you guys because this is the way the fact is, first thing you all say is *oh man this one is in a wheel chair.*”

Schools’ Response. Two Hispanic fathers had different viewpoints when it came to the school system, most of the other fathers worked and were not that active in school programs:

“I think the school looks at you like a good person, I mean very rare you see a parent taking care, a father, taking care of those.”

“When I took my little granddaughter to school, I was looked completely different, the first thing is I was hearing is, ‘Oh, he’s a single man, he’s in a wheelchair with a disability, how can he help this girl.’ Everything was looked up through the negative. They called child services on me, they went over to her school and investigated; they never came to me or my home, they were going to the school asking a lot of questions, asked my granddaughter a lot of questions and everything else. Because there was a lot of things between kindergarten and PreK that they were trying to figure out. How can a single man in a wheel chair bring up a little girl without no females in the house?”

Relatives' responses. Four fathers responded to this question in very different ways that depended on the way they got along with family members:

“I’ve learned by example even if it’s family, you really can’t tell everybody all of your business. Because people are very judgmental, I always tell them the finished product, ‘Yes she’s already graduated from middle school, she’s in high school, we’re preparing for college,’ you know. So what happens in between, those little bumps in the road, people don’t need to know that. The fact that I’m there and I’m taking care of her, that’s all they need to know, for the most part they have been pretty much receptive.”

“In my family a lot of people commended me, you know for stepping up to the plate. You know when I lost my wife, cause I stepped right up to the plate. You know the aunt wanted her, some other family members wanted my daughter you know everybody is coming in line... like *no!* You know this is my child I’m going to do this and I stepped up to the plate, you know most of my family members commend me for doing what I did. *Cause I wasn’t going to let no one else raise my child, I was doing that.*”

An African American father spoke about the rumors that were circulated about him before he became involved with his son, and the struggles he sometimes faces now:

“You talking about what family thought and a lot of things um, when my son came to me um, he came to me like poison, you know like, through my life um, I walked the dark walk for awhile you know wasn’t living the right life. But when he got to me I was living on the right path right, but they brought him poisoned cause he didn’t see half the things they told him, but he came to me poisoned and, um, some of these days, some of the things, you know, he still kick up, some of the events I missed and like, I missed things from his life from the age of 2 to 10 right, yeah some fun, so now you know, um, the poison is still in him, even though he didn’t see half of the stuff. What I do for him, like a lot of things I do for him today is not really based on guilt.”

Two Hispanic fathers responded:

“I got relatives that’s judgmental, you know what I mean and I’m way different from them.”

“In the beginning when I first got my granddaughter, I got nothing but negative outlooks because nobody looked at me. Like I said, when I got here—and I respect you for it—I appreciate you looked at me, but no matter what, you all looked, “except” the exception of whoever came “late” you know. When I walked in the first thing that everyone looked at was this chair and it’s nothing against you guys

because this is the way the fact is, first thing you all say is *oh man this one is in a wheel chair.*”

The responses to this question showed that not only were these fathers watched by strangers, but by their own family members. When everything was running smoothly, they were perceived as successful, but during rough times they felt they were being watched, which led many of them to be apprehensive of family members.

What would you have liked me to ask that you think I missed today?

*“How do we contribute to society as aside to being a father?”*

“Maybe how our situations got to the way they were. Meaning, what happened between you and your ex-wife or the mother of your children, what happened there and do you think there was something there that could have been prevented to help, or how you can have a better relationship with her, or she could have a better relationship with your child? Things on that terms because, you know, we’re in here as fathers and it’s very one sided as our side of the story, but sometimes in order for us to know the whole story.”

“How do we contribute to society as aside to being a father? You know in the community what do we do, you know our livelihood. Because sometimes like, I don’t want a stigma of *O.K. we just single fathers, like single working fathers.* Fathers that have great character that stay in the community, that are positive, that are helping, that have talents, skills, business, so forth, careers, religious, spiritual.”

“I would like you to ask, ‘How could we better our parenting skills to be better fathers?’ You know, for our daughters. And, um, ‘How could we teach our daughters better about hygiene?’... cause that’s very important. We talking about hygiene you know, sexual action you know, how could we teach our daughters sexual hygiene, you know, as a man, you know? Cause that’s a very deep question. I’m down with that now, you know, dealing with that now, and you know, boys. You know, what do you tell your daughters you know about that situation? Because they are going to be confronted with that, you see, I already know my daughter is going to get that experience, she’s going to do it. You know what do I do as a man, you know, what do I tell my daughter, cause she’s going to have her first experience, it’s gonna happen you know, do I get mad with her, you know, do I sit down and explain to her? You know, do I tell her things, that she might not even know? You know if it happens, you know, if she gets pregnant what do I do, what kind of father am I going to be if that happens?”

“How you deal with it, how you, how can a single father...could deal with the unexpected? That’s a good question.”





## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This qualitative study was conducted using two focus groups (n=9 and n=5 respectively), of 14 low-income joint and custodial fathers of color in New York City. Seven African American and seven Hispanic low-income fathers participated. The purpose of the study was to explore the presence of strengths and resiliencies low-income joint and custodial fathers of color possess that enable them to parent, despite obstacles such as living in low income neighborhoods and facing economic challenges. This thesis also sought to assess the presence or absence of gender biases in larger systems such as the family court, or the Administration for Children's Services (A.C.S.), in New York City.

This study responds to the calls of Roberta Coles (2002) and Rodrigo Campos (2008), who articulate the need for father studies that address cultures other than middle income white fathers. This study examined how these joint or sole custody fathers parented their children using their own narratives. The themes that emerged may encourage more positive studies regarding this marginalized group.

#### *Summary of Findings*

This study responded and supported the efforts by Professor Rebekah Coley (2001) to design studies based on the narratives of the fathers themselves. Previous literature which focused on the involvement of low-income fathers was shown to be gathered from the mother's perspective (Black, Dubowitz & Starr, 1999; Gavin, Black, Minor, Abel, Papas & Bentley, 2002; Pruett, Williams, Insabella & Little 2003;

Summers, Boller, Schiffman & Raikes, 2006; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf & Sokolowski, 2008). Maternal responses were usually affected by the nature of the relationships between the parents; thus if she was unhappy the narrative of the mother reflected her negative feelings towards the father.

Using a focus group methodology, questions were designed to gather responses focused on the following four themes: nurturing qualities, protective /strength factors, relationships with their own fathers, and potential biases from larger systems. The findings were content analyzed to provide the researcher with data concerning how these men raised their child(ren)—either alone or with the assistance of the child’s mother.

This next section will address what strengths and unique styles these fathers incorporated when parenting their children.

### *Nurturing Qualities*

The study participant fathers’ assumed daily and weekly caretaking and household routines, this included cooking and doing laundry — tasks often performed by women. They all shopped for food, were cost conscious and looked for bargains in this troublesome economy. Eleven fathers (n=11) stated they learned to cook from women: mothers, aunts, former partners, and their daughters who learned from their mothers. Two fathers (n=2) stated they learned from men. Custodial fathers’ prepared daily meals for their children, while joint custodial fathers’ did so when they had custody of the children.

African American fathers’ of older boys utilized the laundry to help foster their sons’ autonomy. Fathers’ of daughters, regardless of the age of the child or race, did not seem to mind doing their daughters’ laundry for or with them.

The participants did not compare their parenting role to that of the mother. Yet fathers' of daughters all agreed that there were some issues they did not feel so comfortable with, such as personal hygiene, doing hair, and talking about sex. When asked what advantages they had over the mothers as parents', custodial fathers' stated: having an open line of communication, being patient, and having the children with them.

### *Protection and Self-defense*

These fathers' reside in neighborhoods where it is beneficial for them to be protective and to provide knowledge of self defense through advice. Fathers' of older children in general used cell phones to keep in regular contact with their children. "Watch your back, call me when you reach your destination, and don't talk back to the police" were the messages sent to older children regardless of race or gender.

Fathers' of younger children taught them to protect themselves by educating them about the "bad touch" and demonstrated self-defense techniques as a way to prevent serious situations from occurring. Most fathers' used the community and neighbors as watchdogs for their children.

The fathers' of this study spoke of teaching their children "what they have been through." Through their own experiences, fathers provided their children with consequential scenarios from their past, along with crime statistical references from the media, in the hopes that these lessons would lead to better decision making. One father who had been incarcerated spoke of how he did not hide the negative consequences from his children in order to decrease their naivety.

### *How These Findings Support the Prior Literature*

According to Gavin et al. (2002), protection, endowment, socialization, teaching and discipline are five important components and foundational key points to parenting. Dr. Kyle Pruett's book "*Fatherneed*" addresses the distinct qualities and strengths fathers possess that assist with the successful development of a child in the areas of socialization, and problem solving. This study supported the research by Gavin et al. and Pruett. This research also supports the efforts of studies to be respectful of culture by focusing on the strengths of men (Dudley, 2007; Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley & Scaringi, 2008; Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Crean, 2008).

The participants spoke of different situations where their own experiences growing up in the streets enabled them to offer their children strategies in regard to protection, socialization and problem solving in efforts to prevent the negative consequences they experienced. Fathers' of older boys spoke of having to educate their sons about being stereotyped by the police, which may not be a focus with fathers from the dominant culture.

Through socialization in the neighborhood, fathers' taught their children to maneuver in a respectful manner to survive. Proper socialization provided the children with safety nets for themselves through an extra set of eyes to watch over them when fathers were not available. As fathers' stated, they too were watched in the community; people noticed that they were the sole providers for their children and they felt respected for it.

Children watched how their fathers' interacted with others in the community: speak respectfully, watch what is going on, and stay away from trouble. By modeling

street smarts for their children, the men provided survival techniques for maneuvering through low-income neighborhoods.

The Oxford American College Dictionary defines endowment as “an income or form of property given or bequeathed to someone (p.447).” Endowment was provided not through financial means with this sample of fathers, but through knowledge that would provide their children with lessons to persevere in difficult times. Fathers’ spoke of counseling their children when they were confronted by bullies and in situations when they were accosted. These fathers’ made up in love what they could not provide with material goods: they were available to their children through listening to them and spending time with them.

This study supported Coley & Hernandez’s (2006) research on fatherhood that showed how a child’s distinct needs were filled by caretaking fathers. The children in this research are not only provided with food and clothing, but the fathers are concerned about their child’s education, wellbeing and potential, similar to studies with large samples of white middle-class fathers. By gathering information about the fathers’ daily routines with regard to cooking, laundry and relationship time, the study showed fathers as caretakers on a daily basis.

Coley & Hernandez (2006) call for research that reflects the “nature and meaning” of fatherhood. Nine fathers (n=9) in this study spoke about how the loss of their fathers’ affected their childhood and influenced the decision to become more involved in their child(ren’s) lives. Five fathers (n=5) spoke of how they wanted to be exactly like their fathers’ who were involved in their lives. All participants (n=14) spoke of “being there” as their most rewarding aspect of parenting. In addition, they felt great

pride when spending quality time with their children and watching them succeed academically.

Fathers reported noticeable changes in the family court system. This was a major finding in the study which contradicted the findings of Harris (2007). Nine fathers (n=9) reported noticeable changes in the court system where they had previously experienced gender bias. They initially spoke angrily about how they felt about the court system, based on past experiences. They were able to agree there was now more equal opportunity after one participant spoke about his recent sole-custody success.

One father who had previous negative experiences and noticed the changes summed it up in this way:

*“There’s a lot of [new] information a lot of flyers it’s not about the mother, it’s about the parent. What’s the best interest for that kid, it don’t say mom, it says the parent.”*

Fathers in this study did not feel as if their race played any significance in the decision of the courts, but did still feel as if gender influenced judicial decision making. Although they noted changes, fathers stated the need to be respectful and prepared when coming to court. They also discussed not letting their emotions get the best of them as a successful tool in gaining custody or having favorable child support hearings. While fathers stated they had successes with the family court systems, they still felt negatively impacted by the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS).

According to law articles by Harris (2007) and Hill (2007), low-income families were discriminated against by child welfare agencies such as ACS. This research supported these law professors’ beliefs concerning biases in the system and families needing to be cleared of suspicion by this agency before being considered worthy of

parenting. ACS was still reported to impact people's lives according to three participants in this group of fathers. These men spoke of how this agency affected or threatened the unity of their family with unfounded derogatory charges. Two study group participants (n=2) stated they felt they had to be cleared of suspicions that were based on others' reports or suspected sexual abuse. This led to a discussion of how television and newspaper reports about sexual and physical abuse by men affected the ways the public viewed men with custody of their children. They felt that due to the negative actions of some men portrayed in the media in New York City, fathers were given a bad reputation and they were harmfully categorized.

Researchers Hamer & Marchioro (2001) argue that services agencies do not treat men equally to women. The narratives of this group of fathers did not support this literature. Nine fathers (n=9) shared how they felt the family court and child support system was becoming more "father friendly" with pamphlets and new information. Conversely, they also felt the need to be prepared and still felt as if their gender played a part in the decision making processes.

#### *Finding Which Differ from Prior Literature*

This study did not seek to compare the fathers' parenting role to the parenting roles of the mother of the child. The findings did show that these men were capable of providing nurturing care. Past studies that focused on deficit parenting by low-income fathers of color create the bias that this population serves a more peripheral role in the rearing of their children. (Hossain et al., 1997). This study's findings suggest otherwise. These men were present in their child's lives and served a central role as sole and participatory caretakers in every aspect of the child's life.



Several fathers fought to be present in their children's lives to counteract circumstances that could have turned out to be catastrophic for the children. One father was a widower, three fathers were given custody after their partners or wives abandoned the family. Joint custodial fathers stayed in their children's lives despite severed relationships with their partners or wives.

Fathers spoke of being available for their children, modeling after their own fathers who were present in their lives. Conversely, some fathers wanted to undo voids created in their childhood relationships due to the absence of their fathers.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

We are a nation that has evolved since the 1950's from mostly stay-at-home mothers with fathers who provided stability through work and child discipline. Today's father serves more than a peripheral position in the household; his role is that of an engaged caretaker, and in some cases joint or sole custodial parent. Studies are recognizing that low-income fathers of color are very engaged with their children and possess ample parenting skills, which make them worthy of further studies (Hossain et al, 1997; Coles, 2002, 2003; Pruett, 2001; Summers, Boller, Schiffman & Raikes, 2006; Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008).

One interesting and unanticipated finding was the similarities between racial cultures. There was no distinct difference in the way men parented their children between ethnic groups. This supports the hypothesis that single parents in general may have more in common than we know. By studying what methods parents employ to provide their children adequate care, we can potentially undo the demarcation that occurs with comparisons. After all, concern for the welfare of our children requires that we ensure

that they are given equal chances to thrive in today's "multi-ethnicultural", gender-neutral society.

This study serves to contribute to these forerunner studies by helping undo the biases associated with fathers of color and focusing on strengths and resilience. The fathers in this study provided their child with the most important element necessary for the development of a child, a loving relationship. They are available for their child, which is essential regardless of a child's socioeconomic level or racial category.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

This study focused on a sample of 14 low-income fathers from New York City and can not be generalized towards a larger population of low-income fathers of color. Moreover, it focused on the experiences of a highly selective sample of self-selected joint and sole custodial fathers. Although this research was limited to men, the inclusion of low-income mothers, in addition to, comparisons between parents of different socioeconomic levels could lead to the identification of similarities in parenting skills across gender and culture.

This researcher was personally affected by his own experiences as a single custodial father of color and struggled not to let his own biases affect the outcomes of the study. Some of the circumstances the study group participants are currently experiencing, such as recent court dates and A.C.S. investigations, could have biased their own responses. Moreover, fathers also gave responses that could have been affected by the nature of the relationship between the mother of the child and themselves.

This researcher believes that the group interview led to the likelihood of a "group think" process that decreased the probability for other themes to emerge that may have

evolved had there been individual interviews. The likelihood that themes centered around certain individuals' responses was high. Had interviews been conducted individually, fathers might have shared more of their unique experiences without feeling the need to compete or compare narratives. On the other hand, the group format may have helped these fathers feel comfortable in expressing themselves to other men, including the researcher.

According to the 2006 census of families and living arrangements, there are 12.9 million single parent families, with 2.5 million of this number headed by single fathers. Further studies with larger samples from different areas of the country could lead to similar themes that could be utilized by policy makers and agencies to tailor programs to suit the needs of this growing population of caretakers.

The resilience some of these men showed during tumultuous periods in their lives showed the love and support that needs to be identified when studying low-income parents. Although this research was limited to African American and Hispanic low-income fathers of color, this research supported the effort made in recent studies to explore different cultures from a strengths perspective.

In conclusion, by focusing on strengths instead of deficits, opaque lens become translucent as studies are able to look at marginalized groups for their resilience instead of weaknesses. Strengths allow us to look at what is working in the lives of people instead of focusing on insufficiencies that tend to stigmatize and contribute to misunderstandings (Allen & Petr, 1998). The findings in this study encourage future researchers to focus on strengths and resiliencies of low-income fathers of color. It is the hope that this thesis, by documenting fathers' successes will serve as one of many studies

that will support these men in their efforts to parent their children. It is also hoped that this study and others like it will assist administrators of agencies to review policies and train staff members to become aware of possible gender bias when considering single parent resources. By reviewing research studies based on the responses of understudied low-income fathers of color, agencies tap into valuable information to support children from the parent's point of view. It is time we cease sacrificing the potential of marginalized populations who sacrifice everyday to raise their children with the limited resources available to them, by allowing *them* to provide information that will then enable social workers and other agency personnel to better assist them in taking better care of their families.

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November 20, 2008

Jamil Davis

Dear Jamil,

Your final revisions have been reviewed and they are complete. Your application and the accompanying materials are in excellent shape and we are glad to give final approval to this very interesting study. You explained your interest in looking at strengths and coping very well as a researcher.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your fine project. I agree that this population in general hasn't been involved enough in thoughtful research.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Marsha Pruett, Research Advisor

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for participating in my study about single fathers of color. Please feel free to answer the questions I am about to ask. I want to learn from you I want to how you parent your child, what motivates you, what keeps you going and what factors influenced your decisions to become custodial parents. I also want to know what services if any assist you in the parenting of your child/children. If at any time you feel uncomfortable and do not want to answer any of the questions, you do not have to. Let's all be conscious of everyone's input with regard to speaking time and respect all comments.

#### Nurturing qualities

1. Do you have cooking skills? Did you have them before you became custodian to your child or did you have to learn? How did you do this? How do you incorporate shopping and laundry in your weekly routine?
2. What are some of the rewarding aspects of being an involved parent? How does it make you feel to know you are there for your child? What is the normal day like at your home with your child?
3. What are some ways you spend quality time activities with your children? How do you play with your child?

#### Protective qualities and factors

4. Living in low-income neighborhoods may be associated with high crime and cause problem situations for children, what advice have you given your child to ensure their safety? Could you tell me about support systems in your neighborhood that protect your child/children from these risks? What are some of the ways you get help from family members, including the mother of the child? In what ways do you feel you have an advantage over the mother being a joint/custodial father? In what ways do you feel it is a disadvantage being a joint/custodial father?
5. Let's say you have just come home from a long day of work and you are exhausted, dinner is not ready and your child tells you about a situation where he/she was bullied what would you do? Have there been any instances where they were bullied? What did you do, or not do, that you wished you had? What have you learned from your experience?

#### Bias

6. There are many instances where people of color and poor people feel as if they are treated badly by the family court, child support and ACS (Agency for Child Services) what experiences, if any have you had? Can you remember any time that you may have felt discouraged by these systems, tell me about those times. Can you recall any time during the process of obtaining joint/full custody you felt that your race or gender played a part in it? What are some of the ways if any do you feel the larger systems treat men and women different when regarding joint/ full custody of their children? Does the legal system treat people of color equally? What would you like to tell those people at those agencies about your experience?

7. What, if any, has been the societal response to you as an involved joint/custodial parent? Have you noticed any response in public to you being the primary or joint caregiver? Have you noticed any responses from your children's school? What have been your relative's responses to your decision? What would you like people to know about your most memorable positive and negative experiences being a single father?

Decisions to become involved:

8. What situation caused you to seek or take joint/full custody of your daughter/son? What kind of relationship did you have with your father? What did you wish was different with your father? How would this have made a difference in your lives?

Fill in the blank, the message I received from my father regarding parenting is?  
The message I send to my children regarding parenting is?

9. Before becoming a joint/ custodial parent what were you expecting? How has that changed now that you are an involved father?

10. What would you have liked me to ask that you think I missed to today?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear potential participant,

My name is Jamil Davis; I am a master's student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am gathering information for my thesis concerning the strengths and resiliencies of low-income joint and custodial fathers of color. I am inviting you to participate in my research study.

If you agree to volunteer, I will be asking to gather information concerning the strengths you believe it takes to be a single parent. Your participation will take part in a focused group discussion with approximately six to eight other participants. The group will last approximately two and one half hours and you will be financially compensated twenty-five dollars after the group study. There will also be refreshments and free daycare services provided. I will be asking questions and gathering information through short stories concerning any obstacles you may have had regarding services you felt were denied because of your gender, income, or race; I will also be asking about experiences you may have had that were particularly helpful and that seemed to make services accessible to you, as you think they may be for your child's mother or parents you may know who are not parents of color.

There is not likely to be risk involved in your participation, except that at times the questions I ask may cause you to recall experiences that were emotional ones – both positive and negative. If these recollections cause you any distress, and you would like to talk with a counselor, there is a list of local counseling resources provided at the end of this consent form.

My study will be completely confidential outside of the focus groups, who will know each other's names and identities. I will be audio taping the responses to my questions and stories about your experiences as single fathers. All responses will be identified by first name only and I ask that if you should choose to discuss the study that you attach no names in the interest of confidentiality to the group members. I will also be utilizing the services of a transcriber to translate the audio taped recordings into written words to be included in my study. My transcriber will be required to sign a document pledging him/her to complete confidentiality. My research advisor will also have access to the data, after identifying information is removed. All data (notes, tapes, transcripts, questionnaires, etc.) will be kept in a secure location for a period of three years as required by Federal guidelines and any data stored electronically will be protected. If for any reason the materials are needed past the three year period, they will continue to be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when they are no longer needed.

All participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question and may withdraw at any time until after the focus group is completed. You will still be compensated for your time and participation because it is a focus group discussion, should you withdraw after participation, your information will not be able to be retracted.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPURTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

I thank you for your time, attention, and willingness to consider participation in the study.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

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Signature of Researcher

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Date

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding the study you may contact me at 347-591-2652 or e-mail me at [Jay\\_oct15@yahoo.com](mailto:Jay_oct15@yahoo.com). You may also contact the chair of Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee, Dr. Ann Hartman, at (413) 585-7974.

## COUNSELING SERVICES

Pomberg, Annette - Steinway Child & Family Service (718) 585-2013 359 E 148th St,  
Bronx, NY

Bower Residence Committee (718) 590-1235 FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES  
1000 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10451

Cardinal McCloskey Family Outreach Center FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES  
(718) 542-0255 951 Southern Blvd, Bronx, NY 10459

Adolescent & Family Comprehensive (718) 299-2327 45 W Tremont Ave, #67, Bronx,  
NY

Counseling Services of South Bronx FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES 911 Walton  
Ave, Bronx, NY 10452 (718) 590-1790

Hac Family Services FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES 1181 Nelson Ave, Bronx,  
NY 10452 (718) 992-7912

Unitas Therapeutic Community FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICES 940 Garrison  
Ave. Bronx, NY, 10474 (718) 589-0551



# UNITAS

Therapeutic Community, Inc.

940 Garrison Ave • Bronx, New York 10474

**Dr. Ian S. Amritt, FAPA**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Richard P. Sherman**  
PRESIDENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

tel: 718 589.0551

fax: 718 328.4265

[www.unitastc.com](http://www.unitastc.com)

August 27, 2008

Smith College  
School for Social Work  
Lilly Hall  
Northampton, MA 01063

To Whom It May Concern:

Unitas Therapeutic Community, Inc. gives permission for Mr. Jamil Davis to locate his research in this agency. We do not have a Human Subjects Review Board and, therefore, request that Smith College School for Social Work's (SSW) Human Subject Review Committee (HSR) perform a review of the research proposed by Jamil Davis. Unitas Therapeutic Community, Inc. will abide by the standards related to the protection of all participants in the research approved by SSW HSR Committee.

In order to further facilitate this research initiative by Mr. Davis, Unitas also grants permission for recruitment of our clientele for this purpose. If you would like further verification of this phase feel free to contact me at the number listed.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ian S. Amritt  
Executive Director