



# The Absent Black Father and Some Implications for the Young African American Male

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## Abstract

The Absent Black Father is important since fathers are critical to maintaining stability within a traditional family structure. According to (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2006) [1], children growing up without a father are at greater risks for partaking in high activities like illegal drug usage, high alcohol consumption, greater emotional problems, and engagement in other illegal activities. The article highlights the importance of Absent Black fathers and young African American males and the need for a biological father figure to be present in the home. Using data gathered from a mixed methods research approach, I incorporated peer reviewed articles and professional books to outline a brief history of the absent Black father and young African American males. The paper follows the Headings, Abstracts, Introduction, Literature Review: Role of the Black Father, Design and Methodology, Literature Review: The Role of Black Fathers, and Did Public Schools and Progressive Women Groups Fight against Fatherhood? The Isolated Black Male, Synthesis of Data, and Conclusion.

## Subject Areas

Culture

## Keywords

Black Fathers, Black Sons, The African American male

## 1. Introduction

One problem facing African American males is understanding and comprehending the issue of fatherhood. Today some males are transitioned into roles that are against or outside the traditional male role model. For example, a male in the liberal arena is wearing female clothing, putting on women's lips gloss, and partaking into other androgynous behaviors. Adkins (2009) [2] mentioned that one factor

contributing to the androgynous movement has been the absent father. The absent Black Father is important in this equation since fathers are critical to maintaining stability within a family. According to (Rosenberg *et al.*, 2006) [1], children growing up without a father are at greater risks for partaking in illegal activities like illegal drug usage, high alcohol consumption, greater emotional problems, and engagement in other negative activities. One negative activity, for example, that deserves much attention, is sexual roles within society. Traditional sexual roles within society have been practiced by a segment portion of heterosexual Black males. In contrast, Milton's (2012) [3] research argues that in the twenty-first century, traditional sex roles have shifted based on class structure rather than race. This change has helped create a more diverse dating culture within urban communities. The article expressed one viewpoint that flexibility in dating has aided in creating ambiguity for Black men about relationship expectations, which has contributed to more disruptions or challenges within the Black family structure.

Confused sexual roles to some individuals have instilled a sense of identity crisis that questioned the identity of males within a family structure. The purpose of this article is to explore fatherhood and its impact on African American males. According to Ruggles (1994) [4], the African American family throughout recent history has either been extended families that consisted of other relatives like "grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, or single-headed female households" that headed the family unit (p. 136). In contrast, Gutman (1977) [5] documented that Black families have been strong and resilient (both male and female households) after slavery, the Civil War, and the black migration of the 1930s and 1940s due to the father being in the household.

Despite the lack of good housing, poor living communities, and weak monetary income, the role of fathers has been the one positive factor that aided young black males in their survival within society.

## 2. Design and Methodology

The data was gathered from a mixed methods approach that incorporated a database search synthesis of interviews, surveys, and observations that were derived from Voith *et al.* (2024) [6] and Fader (2021) [7] works focusing on Black males and fatherhood.

Professionals who studied fatherhood were selected to detail their experiences with poverty and Black Fatherhood. Data were also analyzed through the lens of the African American Male Theory (AAMT) created by Dr. Bush. The AAMT combined the experiences of both African American men and boys, emphasizing self-determination, Black culture, and social justice. Moreover, AAMT specializes in a multi-disciplinary framework that analyzes the lived experiences of Black boys and men, from a pre- and post-enslavement history period, culture, and consciousness. (Bush *et al.*, 2013, p. 1-12) [8]. Professionals who studied fatherhood were selected to detail their experiences with poverty and Black Fatherhood. Both

AAMT and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) [9] microsystem were linked together to create a generic picture of fatherhood involvement and Black male development. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) [9] microsystem includes components of immediate environments and interpersonal relationships. The immediate environment is the social environment where individuals reside in a social setting. Interpersonal relations are two-way relationships involving individuals or groups that illustrate outward actions and expressions.

### 3. Literature Review: The Role of Black Fathers

One reason why the role of fathers is important within society is the development of young males to become future fathers. According to Munroe (2008) [10] a father is one that "upholds everything within society" (p. 27). Taking care of a family is essential in strengthening a male's role in supporting biological family members. A father's support is the foundation of a family unit because he is a seed that carries nourished substances that support the family. A father role in producing children is like the beginning of human life that follow the design set by God. A father is rooted in God's image because God is the FATHER to all spiritual existences. In contrast, males that grow up without a biological father in the households in some cases, exhibits aggressive behavior that cause more problems. One reason for this negative correlation of absent fatherhood according to the AAMT can be partially attributed to Bronfenbrenner (1977) [9] model of interconnected environment system that included microsystem, and mesosystem. The microsystem component involves a person's personality, belief, perception and intellectual capacity. The Mesosystem, on the hand, bridged the link between the environment of the microsystem and form a connection between the two models. Wilson (2009) [11] in discussing the Moynihan Report assess that a lot of attentions has been broadcast concerning Moynihan's statement "The Tangle of Pathology," and the weaknesses of the Black male and the family unit but noted that Moynihan should be credited with highlighting the various dynamics of the Black family by "synthesize both structural and cultural components" that analyses the role of Black men (p. 44). Black males are important because they provide critical learning information to their children. For example, Santrock (1977) [12] studied 45 absent and residential fathers of white students in the fifth grade and the results revealed that boys showed the most aggression from households where parents were divorced and fathers that departed households later in that child's life. Another contributing factor is the subject of poverty. Hill (2023) [13] examination of the poverty rate from the years of 1964 to 2020 suggested that the poverty rate was at 11 percent to 15 percent for many decades. Since "1964 more than 36 million Americans or 19 percent were determined to be living at or below the federal poverty level" (p. 4). Fast forward to the present, about 41 million Americans are still living below the poverty line, 60 years later. According to Hill (2023) [13] one variable that expands poverty for many individuals is the employment status of today's worker. In Chicago, for example, the poverty rate was held at 6.8 percent

for individuals who were participating in the labor force, and 31.3 percent for individuals (16 years and up) who did not work at all during that year. Some researchers offered two reasons why poverty continue to exist today, and they were males that did not obtained a college degree and males that receive Social Security disability insurance (SSDI). The father's role goes beyond the roles of employment and work status of their children. Fathers also play a role in shaping their sons' sexual behaviors and sexual identity. For example, Leavell *et al.*, (2012) [14] documented that "father's channel gendered patterns towards their children at an early age, even before that child has a clear understanding of clear gender roles" (p. 53). Markham *et al.*, (2010) [15] also documented that the variables of family structure, engagement, parental monitoring, cohesion, and parent-child connectedness all positively affects the sexual habits of a young male child.

Fagan (2024) [16] using data from a Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study examined 2578 adolescents and their relationship with their biological fathers and found that Black children were more "independent than other ethnic groups and more likely to seek out a relationship with their nonresident fathers than younger children" (p. 157). The study confirmed that black fathers were no less involved with their children than other ethnic groups" and that black fathers provide positive stability in a child life in certain cases (p. 144) [16].

#### **4. Did Public Schools and Progressive Women Groups Fight against Fatherhood?**

Some within the conservative community have argued for years that progressive women groups and public-school officials have fought against fatherhood and other issues facing African American males, however, this point is not clearly well known in academic's settings. According to some conservative groups, a small segment of educators from the 1960s and 1970s pushed an agenda within public education that enforced a new morality called value clarification that promoted student moral autonomy and independence away from traditional values. Sizer (1973) [17] believed that it was wrong for teachers to instruct or impose traditional values on students, but rather teachers should guide students to discover their own value system. A value system that went against traditional values and fatherhood. For example, according to Sommers (2000) [18] "fathers played a central role in shaping the social ecosystem of a male child, teaching boys a sense of responsibility and conscience in manhood development" (p. 130). Under the public-school system, for example the role of young males is consistently reshaped so that they become flexible and be negotiate out of following any values that resemble traditional standards.

Justice Ginsburg argued in *United States v. Virginia* (1996) [19] that to make up for past discrimination against females, some form of compensation or remedy should be applied to cases or programs that were excluded from past constitutional guidelines. Ginsburg did not support full protections for female programs but rather believed that gender-based programs or classifications meet "exceed-

ingly persuasive justification” (p. 175). Although the law did not strictly prohibit males in promoting single-sex schools, the law did however discourage the promotion of a single-sex schools for African American males.

A large body of research suggests that the lack of job opportunities has a profound negative effect in the black community and the Black women with children. Sampson (1987) [20] Rainwater (1966) [21]; Liebow (1967) [22] documented that the lacked on monetary income in a family unit creates more male joblessness and more growth of female headed households in the urban community. The formation of female headed households tend to be very poor and resides in high crime areas. Wilson (1978) [23] in the “The Declining Significance of Race” mentioned that the large amount of female headed household deprived from a combination of factors such as male joblessness, high rates of incarceration, and premature mortality rate of Black men. Male joblessness has contributed to the low availability of marriageable black men within an urban setting.

Thus, an alternative explanation for the increased number of absent Black fathers may lie in the low availability of marriageable Black males. For example, according to Dye (2005) [24] in 2004, about 59 percent of Black females were raising a child on their own; in contrast, the number of white females raising children stood at 22 percent. This factor, along with previous data presented by Wilson (1978) [23] may be one indicator why the number of absent fathers has steadily increased over the years.

## 5. Progressive Female Groups and Fatherhood

Another trend that has increased negative relationships between a father and a son has been the loss of “time.” Time is important because once time is lost, it cannot be retrieved. Taylor (2011) [25] mentioned that a Pew Research Center Report called “The Tale of Two Fathers” reiterated that between 1965 thru 2000, Fathers spent about 2.6 hours with their children in 1965 and 6.5 hours in 2000. After 2000, the responsibility of raising children rose significantly with mothers. Fathers that did not reside with their children often would view themselves negatively because they believed they were not providing enough money to their children (Goodwill *et al.*, 2019) [26]. Roopnarine *et al.*, (2005) [27] revealed that low-income fathers were involved in the lives of their children and did support them. Fagan (2024) [16] examinations of low-income Black Fathers revealed that Black Fathers regardless of “residents or nonresident status, did have a positive relationship with their children” and helped fight against negative stereotypes (p. 62). Leavell *et al.*, 2012) [14] noted that Black Fathers’ engagement with their children during early childhood provided many sons an opportunity to draw closer towards gender-roles in playful activities. “Playful activities that affirmed traditional gendered role identity” (p. 53).

In contrast, however, women groups such as the National Organization for Women Legal Defense and Education Fund (NOWLDEF) and the National Organization of Women (NOW) have chosen an alternative method in dealing with

young African American males. Some progressive female organizations believed that the image of African American boys should be adjusted so that they will not have negative encounters with the police and school officials, due to the thug image. Researcher Dow (2016) [28] interviewed 60 middles to upper middle-class mothers and documented their concerns about the thug image and its harmful effect on today's youths. Using a four-strategy approach called, Experience management, environment management, image management and emotion management focused on mothers involving their sons in activities like sports or music that build up a softer image in that's child life rather than the tough urban male. Environment management occurs when a mother moved her sons to a predominately white community to curb their child interactions with inner city youths and other urban city functions. Image and emotions management focused on Black youths not wearing any urban attire that would be viewed by others as too masculine or hard-core. Finally, emotion management placed great restrictions on males not showing any emotions like anger or frustrations towards the public so that they appear to be docile and non-intimidating. Another example of Women groups fighting against fatherhood and young males was the promotion of an all-Black male school in Detroit, Michigan called Malcolm X Academy. Malcolm X Academy had high attendance rates comparable to other schools within the Detroit's area and scored at or above the national mean on the California Achievement test in 1992. Ross, (2019); [29] Watson *et al.*, (1996) [30] documented that the (NOWLDEF) and The American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) filed an injunction against Malcolm X Academy on the grounds of sex in that the school discriminated against three African American young females. Malcolm X Academy still exists today but with many compromises of both male and females being part of that school student's population. According to Watson *et al.*, (1996) [30], anytime a Black male form a supporting environment that promotes manhood, many women and feminist groups would imitate sexism to the courts to block any attempts that uplift black male freedom.

## 6. The Isolated Black Male

Fader (2021) [7] examined 45 youths from Philadelphia that had contacts with the legal system. This group of males residing at home were forced to adapt to a strategy called network avoidance that avoided any type of conflicts that attracted attention from law enforcement and females. Fader (2021) [7] interviewed 45 Black and white males within the age bracket of 25 thru 34 from a predominately incarcerated area and their activities involved network avoidance. Network avoidance involves not attending any social activities or encounters with neighbors within a social setting. Moreover, this group of urban males avoid females contacts on a consistent basis and white offenders with similar criminal backgrounds behaved differently by "freely walking around their community and dating females without fear or repercussion. The fear of law enforcement was also absent from their interactions" (p. 22) [7]. White youths from the study revealed why White Ameri-

cans have very little fear of the Criminal Justice system. Maurer (1999) [31] mentioned that young African American males represented about “49 percent of prison inmate’s nationality, and one in three (32%) of black males from the age group 20 to 29 are under some form of criminal justice supervision on any given day” (p. 3).

In contrast, McDonald’s (2010) [32] book “Are Cops Racist” expressed strong justification for law enforcement stopping Black citizens in low-income neighborhoods. McDonald (2010) stated that one factor why cops tend to stop Black citizens on a regular basis was the issue of crime and not race. However, one misleading point about McDonald’s assessment was the issue of crime. Not all crimes that are committed throughout the U.S are reported to law enforcement agencies. Only reported crimes are listed in the Unified Crime Report (UCR) and they are either underreported or over reported in some cases. Voith *et al.*, (2024) [6] offers new insight into the building up of fatherhood by the creations of a government program aim at improving the relationship between a father and a son. The initiative focused on a healthier relationship between both parties by improving communication skills and the development of social skill sessions that improve better outcomes for trauma victims. A curriculum called 24/7 Dads is the most popular and was implemented at more 430 organizations across the United States. 24/7 Dads focus on three steps, and they are engaged in fatherhood, healthy relationship, and economic stability. The three step programs, with the assistance of a case management team, build up both participants in forming greater strategies in overcoming trauma-related events in either party life or deficits in communication skills development.

## 7. Synthesis of Data

The struggles and hardships of African American males are partially attributed to young males not having a father figure in their life. According to Mclanahan *et al.*, (2013) [33] the lack of a father figure in the home promoted children to exhibit more negative outcomes such as social emotional development problems. Fader’s (2021) [7] study highlighted hardships faced by some young African American males in an urban area, focusing on their frustration and dealing with the criminal justice system. However, the study was limited to topics like dating, marriage, and how these males would spend time raising or caring for a family, without addressing the wider scope of fatherhood or coping in other settings. Fader (2021) [7] noted the behaviors of white males in similar situations but did not address why they managed to overcome law enforcement challenges, while African American males did not.

In another study by Voith *et al.* (2024) [6] dealing with fatherhood and young Black males, the researchers offered an improved outlook of African American males dealing with various social problems. For example, Voith *et al.* (2024) [6] documented that a curriculum program may improve outcomes for clients dealing with social problems by helping trained professionals and other methods in

helping various individuals and groups.

## 8. Conclusion

The paper touches on Black fathers in America and how they may help their sons overcome life negative outcomes. Dow (2016) [28] work detailing how mothers helped their sons avoid the “Thug” image was an eye opener because it brought attention to describing how far mothers will go in protecting their children. Males refraining from hanging out with other black males is not the correct response. Network avoidance appears to aid young individuals in some form of regression and may open deeper wounds that may be more difficult to recover later. What the literature has consistently stated is that biological fathers are needed in all phases of a young male life. Fader (2021) [7] research concerning young males in one urban area was one example how some males have chosen to cope with life stressors. Males need to socialize with females in order that more Black families may be developed or created. Voith *et al.* (2024) [6] discussion about an initiative that strengthened support for fathers in overcoming negative outcomes in the lives of young Black males was one positive step in fatherhood. For example, the creation of the 24/7 Dad curriculum offers fathers an opportunity to receive assistance in three stages dealing with engaged fatherhood, healthy relationships, and economic stability. With the help of facilitators and group dynamics, fathers demonstrated improved social learning skills and greater communications skills development in relating to their sons. Programs such as the 24/7 Dad curriculum may be more effective in helping both father and son overcome issues in life and perhaps be a better tool in improving fatherhood. Future research should focus on young males living with only their mothers and explore coping strategies to help them overcome negative outcomes.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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