To Parent or Provide:  
The Effect of The Provider Role on Disadvantaged Men’s Decisions about Fatherhood and Paternal Engagement

Dissertation

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By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study sought to gain an understanding of disadvantaged men’s experience with the provider role. The study was designed to explore how these men construct, express, and negotiate their identities as fathers and providers. It explores disadvantaged men’s inner worlds with respect to fatherhood consciousness and perceived barriers presented by the provider role. Analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 46 disadvantaged fathers, ages 18-55, of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds. The three main goals that this study hoped to discover were how disadvantaged fathers conceptualize the provider role; what perceived barriers the provider role presents to disadvantaged fathers and what affect these barriers have on their involvement in the lives of their children; and finally which form of investment, economic or social, do disadvantaged fathers consider most beneficial for their children.

This study utilized the active interview process created Holstein & Bubrium (1995), as well as a coding and thematic analysis methodology presented in Strauss & Corbin (1998). Data analysis led to the discovery of the following themes: a need to redefine the provider role; a desire to negotiate a multi-faceted form of investment; the emergence of barriers created as a result of the provider role; and the toll of disenfranchisement as a result of said barriers. Fathers consistently express the need to redefine the provider role in a wider scope. The desire to include social and emotional
components was mentioned frequently. Subsequently, fathers sought to prioritize the social and emotional well-being of their children and share the economic provider role responsibilities with the mother of their children.

Fathers also articulated the many barriers that they feel the provider role presents them in regards to fatherhood. Specifically, they discussed the effects of continuous social persecution and disengagement; child support orders resulting in the loss of time spent with their children. Subsequent themes which also emerged include withdrawn visitation by mothers due to the perceived hazard of the communities these men could afford to live in, and lack of support from government and social entities. Moreover, fathers also spoke of an enormous and unavoidable feeling of disenfranchisement due to these barriers.

Determining what, and how, to invest is also important for these men. Many of the men described how they negotiated investing in the lives of their children. Fathers felt that the desire encompassed in social investment outweighed the obligation that economic investment entailed, and that it had a greater impact on their child’s future. Some of the responses of the fathers suggested the centrality of organizations, specifically those of a religious nature, in their investment decisions. Disengaging as a result of social pressure is also a resonant theme that prevailed throughout most of the interviews. Fathers believed that barriers and social pressures created an environment which is toxic to their attempts at being a father.
Dedicated to my mother,
whose love, passion, and diligence have been key to my success.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research and literature on fatherhood is vast, multi-methodological in approach, comprehensive, and designed to address a number of important social, cultural, and historical questions. Some of this research has led to suggested solutions or social and legislative policies, other research has led to semi --or partially-- developed solutions, and even more research has led to questions. Still, some facets of fatherhood remain completely ignored and unexplored. Over the past twenty years, social scientists have invested a substantial amount of money, time, and energy into learning more about how fathers interact and invest in their children and how this interaction and investment affects outcomes for fathers, children, and families as a whole (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Jain, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996; Lamb, 1997). While recent research indicates that fatherhood is turning out to be a diverse and continually evolving subject matter that defies simplistic norms, a lot of work remains to be done on the issue.

Understanding disadvantaged men’s desires and approaches to creating familial bonds through fatherhood is one area that needs additional research. It is important to draw attention to
their experiences within the procreative realm. During the economic recession of the 1980s, family researchers examined provider role expectations for poor and minority fathers (McLoyd, 1989). Even though the experiences of disadvantaged families have primarily been framed in poverty literature, some scholars argue for the explicit inclusion of disadvantaged families into work/family research (Kelly, 1988; Wilson, 1987).

There is an abundance of evidence that shows that men’s decisions about fatherhood are linked to their opportunities, expectations, experiences and decisions about paid work. Among men that are married, becoming a father is associated with both increased hours at work (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997) and increased income (Nock 1998). Work affects some men’s psychological capacity for parenting. Many poor men attribute positive changes in their work lives to increased motivation on becoming a father or shortly after the birth of a child. Noncustodial disadvantaged fathers report that their ability to spend time with their children and to provide them with non-monetary nurturance is greatly affected by their ability to provide for them financially. This is, in part, due to custodial parents limiting nonresidential fathers’ access to children when monetary support is nonexistent, or rare (Pearson & Thoennes, 1998).

However, the relationship between noncustodial fathers and their children is not solely a result of maternal gatekeeping; some fathers create a self-imposed ban from interacting with their children based upon not being able to support them financially (Crowley 1998; Edin, Lein & Nelson, 2002). Disengaged and absentee fathers have been called the most destructive trend of the current generation (Blakenhorn, 1995). Violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, unwed pregnancy, psychological disorders, obesity; nearly every major social and physical pathology has been, or can be, linked to a father’s presence or lack thereof. According to
Cynthia Daniels (1998), the majority of inmates, high school dropouts, adolescent murderers and rapists come from fatherless homes. However, she does not mention, or put this in the context of status.

In the past two decades, fathering has garnered considerable media attention. With the increasing number of women that have entered the workforce, and conversely, the growing number of men that find themselves unemployed, a great amount of pressure has been placed on gendered responsibilities within the domestic sphere. Higher rates of divorce have also increased the number of men living apart from their children, and the number that become single fathers. With the cultural shift in societal expectations for men to increase their responsibilities within the domestic realm over the past decade men have had to learn how to renegotiate procreative, father, and family identities.

The debate over what it means to be a father continues to create, and promote, controversy in our society regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, or even geographic location. Certain segments of society devalue paternal engagement by waging battles in the media, courts, and legislative that prevent, albeit sometimes inadvertently, fathers who fail to provide financial support from being engaged in the lives of their children (Blank 1989; Garfinkel & McLanahan 1989). This has caused many fathers who cannot pay child support to become disengaged. It has been shown that noncustodial fathers who pay child support are more likely to spend time with their children than their nonpaying counterparts (Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Chang 1989).
The Emergence of the Engaged Father

There is emerging evidence that some men are assuming the tasks and responsibilities of caring and being involved in the lives of their children (Hirst, 2001). Many men feel uncomfortable in the caring roles because they contradict the dominant ideologies and practices of masculinity that imply men are biologically, psychologically and emotionally ill suited to undertake the tasks of being an involved parent. Some fathers see caring responsibilities as something that interferes with their ability to be the breadwinner, which continues to be a significant foundation for men’s personal social identities (Brandth & Kvande, 1998). The intense demands of caring for a child can generate discordance between caring and primary relationship roles of being a father. In these ways, fathers being more engaged and involved with their children are providing care in contexts that are likely to conflict with established gender and relationship expectations.

Transforming social and economic conditions are arguably undermining the practical and moral imperatives for women to automatically assume caring roles (Gerson, 2002). An increase in opportunities to pursue higher education and employment opportunities are hampering women’s availability and inclination to be solely responsible for the role of nurturing and involved parent (Lefley, 1997). In contemporary families, women may also be motivated to create some form of economic independence in the face of perceived relationship fragility in terms of emotional ties. Over the past thirty years there has been an increase in the number of households’ budgets that rely on women maintaining dual responsibilities for paid labor outside the home and unpaid caregiving responsibilities within the home (Gerson, 2002). Diversifying family and couple formations have also led to the reassessment of whether or not caring tasks
can automatically be assumed to be an essential function of families, or the responsibility of women. Thus, as fewer women are available to perform unpaid caring work in the home, increasing numbers of men are caring for children (Ducharme et al., 2006).

The experiences of men, who take on caring roles, and the dissonance between caring and traditional expectations associated with masculinity, have been explored in a limited body of empirical work (Gerson, 2002). Even less attention has been given to exploring the potential for dissonance between traditional gender roles, primary family relationship roles, and caregiving roles, as well as how the competing demands of these roles are navigated. Research has primarily focused on employed men and women’s strain in negotiating paid work and family demands. Milkie & Peltola (1999), using the 1996 General Social Survey, find that men and women share similar levels of success and failure in balancing work-family tradeoffs. However, they fail to control for socioeconomic status where research has shown that individuals of a lower socioeconomic status exhibit a primary focus on caregiving responsibilities, and thus may experience a different level of success than their counterparts.

**Contradictions and Tensions in Father Involvement**

There are clear emotional, moral, and legal imperatives that compel parents to care for their children (Wyness, 1997). However; to be engaged and involved as a father is a role that is replete with tensions for both parents. It has been documented, in general, that disadvantaged fathers spend much less time with their children than their female counterparts (Furstenberg, 1995; Pleck, 1997). Furstenberg uses case studies of inner city parents to explore how they account for the way that men perform as parents, and interpret their responsibilities. Many
fathers are not only less involved in the lives of their children but are unlikely to be involved in the decision making process of how their income is spent in terms of providing for their child’s needs (i.e.; clothing, food, school supplies, etc.). Even with society moving towards a more equal distribution of unpaid family work and outside employment between the genders, mothers are still more likely to take responsibility for the unpaid caring tasks within the family. Regardless, there are growing expectations that men should take more responsibility for the care of children than was assumed by their own fathers (Henwood & Procter, 2003). However; simultaneous to the transformation that parental roles are undergoing, are the creation of new stresses that parents are having placed on them.

Previous research (Reay, Bignold, Ball, and Crib; 1998) has argued that discursive shifts that emphasize individualism and consumption have increasingly led to children being seen as the “products of parenting,” and parents are viewed as having failed if they do not “produce” a child who lives up to social and moral ideals. This leads to behavioral, social, and psychological problems among children being directly attributed to lack of paternal involvement (Ambert, 1994). Consequently, non-involved fathers of children with social and behavioral problems have become the scapegoats for their children’s condition.

It is almost impossible for fathers to avoid these distressing suspicions because fathering comprises such a comprehensive set of responsibilities. Fathers are supposed to help referee the exposure of their children to social, cultural, educational elements (to name a few) and be their protectors from harm; and so fathers occupy space in most positions within the web of blame. The levels of responsibility attributed to fathers’ means that there are expectations that fathers will provide solutions to their child’s problems, irrespective of their capacity to do so or the
origin of the problem (Ambert, 1994). Furthermore, these expectations are “limitless” in that this responsibility could extend into the child’s adulthood.

Caring for children involves other kinds of responsibilities and strains such as spending time. Integrating the responsibilities and obligations of caregiving with other aspects of the men’s lives can present role incongruities that are difficult to resolve. It has been argued that parenting has ceased to be a highly structured activity that is sustained through comprehensive social norms and obligations and has taken on new aspects that are in direct conflict with the American dream of a nuclear family.

The increased societal desire from men to be more engaged as fathers must be grafted onto existing roles and relationships between fathers, children, and spouses. These primary relationships generate different and new tensions in the roles of engaged fathers, and there is limited understanding of how men are managing the potential tensions between providing, being engaged, and gender roles. Indeed, the empirical literature largely examines the experiences of women who are providing the bulk of informal care and engaged parenting within families. Given these issues, and the contradictions, pressures, and tensions that are emerging around paternal engagement, it is timely to consider the experiences of men caring for and being involved in the lives of their children so that it can be determined how to best support them in these roles.

**Fathering across Race, Class, and Culture**

During the past decade, a new generation of fatherhood advocates has insisted that fatherlessness, regardless of race, is one of the most critical issues social issues of our time. By
studying fathers of various races and cultures, scholars have gained important insights that can benefit all fathers (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hewlett, 2000). One key example is how our conceptualization of fathering in the United States has been expanded to include, and utilize, the concept of father “investment” in children, rather than “involvement” (Hewlett 2000). The concept of investment is broader, taking into account anything a father does to benefit a child. In some cultures a father may have very little direct contact with his children, but may provide important connections to the extended family or community. This network of support is vital for the child’s well-being and points to the need for a broader conceptualization of fathering in the United States as well (Hewlett, 2000).

In the United States, much of the fathering research not concerned with white, middle class samples has centered on low-income African American men (Hamer, 2001; Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002). As a group, African American fathers are often faced with many challenges, both contemporary and historical such as a lack of educational attainment, racism, a hostile media, a history of impoverishment, negative stereotypes, and a host of economic problems (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hamer, 2001; Jarret et al., 2002). In a society where fathering is still largely defined in economic terms, this last challenge may be the most difficult for these men to overcome (Graham & Beller, 2002; Hamer, 2001).

Many African American fathers were never married to the mothers of their children and do not live with their children (Nelson et al., 2002). This “never-married” and often nonresidential status means that they usually have little authority over what happens to their children, especially as the children get older. Never-married fathers tend to be poorer, less educated, and less ready for the work force than fathers who marry (Hamer, 2001). Many of
these men feel as though their voices are not valued and that the children’s mothers keep them from being involved with their children (Hamer, 2001). This behavior of mothers is known as maternal gate keeping whereby mothers' beliefs about the roles of the fathers are said to contribute to the quality of father involvement in their children's lives.

In addition, low-income men are more likely to father children at a younger age than their upper-income counterparts. Young fathering worsens a bleak economic situation, and makes it extremely difficult for fathers to maintain a strong bond with their new families (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Early fathering can also hinder a young man’s own development. While still trying to grow up himself, he must try to meet the needs of an infant and build a relationship with the child’s mother (Allen & Doherty, 1996). In spite of these challenges, many low-income men aspire to be good fathers. They overcome huge economic obstacles to provide for their children as best they can (Hamer, 1998). As new fathers, they intend to stay involved with children, even though that involvement may wane over time (Nelson et al., 2002). In the face of complete poverty, many of these men provide for their children even when that provision is limited to giving of their time and energy (Hamer, 1997). Family scholars need to know more about these men, who appear to care so much for their children, even in the face of economic uncertainty and social disapproval (Nelson et al., 2002).

The aforementioned issues evoke controversy in our society. Significant segments of society devalue emotional investment as opposed to economic investment by fathers, waging battles in the popular press, legislative forums, and courts in order to prevent disadvantaged fathers from being engaged in the lives of their children unless they meet the monetary requirements. Despite these obstacles, disadvantaged fathers have found ways to parent and
actively be engaged in the lives of their children, and the definition of what it means to be a father has changed dramatically over the last two decades to include these changes. Yet, there is little understanding of how disadvantaged men experience the realm of fatherhood in terms of pressures and motivations to provide, and the effect that said pressures and motivations have on their decision-making process of whether or not to partake in parenting, providing, and being engaged in their children’s lives. My analysis attempts to foster a deeper understanding of how disadvantaged men conceptualize and negotiate their sense of self as providers and/or engaged fathers.

**Research Questions**

This research strives to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: How do disadvantaged fathers conceptualize the provider role?

Research Question 2: What perceived barriers does the provider role present to disadvantaged fathers? And what effect does this have on their involvement in the lives of their children?

Research Question 3: Which form of investment, economic or social, do disadvantaged fathers consider most beneficial to their children?

**Importance of the Research Questions**

This research will document disadvantaged fathers’ experiences regarding the difficulties they face in understanding and negotiating the provider role, as well as the benefits of encouraging factors that facilitate engagement with children (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Dudley, 1991). The results of this research is aimed to benefit disadvantaged fathers. It is well documented that society holds a negative view of many disadvantaged fathers and their
enactment of the provider role in the family (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Hamer, 1998). Even new legislation enacted to promote “responsible” fathering (Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2006) has been created in a way that constructs “responsibility” solely as a product of paying child support and the provider role. This leaves the social aspects of fatherhood, at which these men have the ability to flourish, rarely addressed. This study also seeks to help explain that role. It is also important to remember that understanding the behavior of disadvantaged fathers may benefit their children and former or current partners/spouses as well (Doherty et al., 1998; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999; Silverstein, 1996). Research that leads to improved social policy can positively impact both father and child outcomes, and relieve the pressures of parenting for the child’s mother (Hamer, 2001; Popenoe, 1996).

No matter what the causes of conflict with the provider role and lack of engagement are, it is important to hear from fathers themselves if these conflicts are to be addressed and engagement levels are to increase (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Furstenberg, 1995). Speaking directly with disadvantaged fathers will uncover some specific strategies that they use to negotiate these roles and determine the amount of paternal engagement. These strategies are important knowledge for fathers who find themselves in this situation, as well as for practitioners who work with disadvantaged fathers and their children.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The History of Fatherhood

When thinking about fathers and what should be expected of them in today’s society, it is helpful to remember that the fathering role has changed through time (Lamb, 2000; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1995). It is not static, but responds to cultural, economic, political, and social forces. Unlike the mothering role, which seems to be almost universally agreed upon, and is more clearly defined given the biological connection between mother and child, the fathering role is more of a social invention (Garbarino, 2000; Hewlett & West, 1998; Silverstein, 1996; Townsend, 2002). As such, fathers are expected to vary their behavior depending on the needs of the family at various points in time (LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Jaret, 1991). The last 200 years of American history illustrate that fact, and serve as a backdrop to my thinking on this issue.

The Provider Role

By the middle of the 19th century more and more fathers were leaving the family farm and home to work in industry, and the dominant image of the good father was that of a breadwinner (Lamb, 2000). This separation of the public and private spheres assigned men the
responsibility for earning the household’s income, while their wives took on more duties related to homemaking and child rearing. The provider ideal for fathers was reinforced by this new lifestyle that limited a father’s contact with his children, and seemed to be a good fit for mothers, who were deemed better able to meet the direct needs of children (LaRossa, et al., 1991). The fathering role was dominated by the expectation of providing until the Great Depression. However, this was not the case with working-class fathers, who were unable to provide enough income without help from their wives and extended family (Mintz, 1998). This was particularly true of African American fathers who, even after the Civil War, had to face a racist society that locked them into the difficult economic realities of sharecropping and tenant farming (Furstenberg, 1995; Hamer, 2001; Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

**Changing Expectations for Providing**

Townsend (2002) recognized that “locating men in specific historical circumstances illuminates the role of economic structures in magnifying the effects of cultural patterns” (p. 137). During early periods of industrialization and urbanization, men’s roles as fathers were increasingly identified as the sole breadwinner in the public domain, in direct contrast to women’s roles as good mothers in the private domain of the family household (Griswold, 1993). The role of the “good provider” became a specialized male role in the transition from subsistence to market-oriented economies between 1830 and present day (Bernard, 1981). As “good fathers,” men provided resources to their families through full-time wage contract labor. In most families, the ability to locate, obtain, maintain, and identify with employment in the public
workforce was gendered. It defined masculinity and, in turn, fatherhood. In years when the economy contracted, men’s parenting statuses also suffered (Elder, 1999).

Commitment to men’s employment retains a “long term, consistent, full-time, and almost universal” place in family life, with 95% of all married men between the ages of 25-45 having worked in every year since 1960 (Townsend, 2002). Contemporary fathers fulfill only a fraction of mothers’ time spent in household labor (Pleck, 1997). However, recent changes in work and family arrangements over the past two decades have diluted the prerogatives of the good provider role (Bernard, 1981). The dramatic growth in the number of mothers in the workforce has increased both household and emotional demands for caregiving made on male providers (Waite & Nielsen, 2001). Moreover, in the postindustrial shift to service-based industries, families increasingly have organized their work and family activities by allocating providing and caregiving responsibilities between both working fathers and working mothers (Casper & Connell, 1998).

Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) note that “contemporary discussions of [paternal] involvement usually connote something beyond provision” (p. 85). Men’s roles as sole providers have been subject to negative stereotyping by both women and “new” fathers, who disassociate themselves from defining fatherhood as providing and explore new cultural models for nurturant fathering (Daly, 1995; LaRossa, 1997). Work/family research often assumes that men may choose, or at least negotiate, between providing and caregiving activities (Voydanoff, 2002). “Good” fathers choose and succeed in providing for their children—and “bad,” deadbeat, or absent fathers do not choose or are unable to fulfill these expectations (Furstenberg, 1988).
Although in some literature the lines between providing and caregiving are clear, many contemporary men are unclear about the priority of providing. Drawing on life history interviews with men and women in a range of socioeconomic contexts, Gerson (2002) described how they increasingly renegotiate providing and caregiving activities amongst themselves. For example, one group of respondents discussed how they, and the mothers of their children, would split the brunt of either responsibility depending on who was in a better position to fulfill either role at that given time. Townsend (2002) delineated a package deal in which “work is not a separation from family, but a manifestation of family commitment” (p. 136). Employment remains materially and symbolically central to fatherhood, with implied security and parental consistency as the most salient dimensions of contemporary provider roles. Providing has become an interface phenomenon that sits between family and economic subsystems, absorbing elements of roles as worker, parent, and partner (Cazenave, 1979). This interface echoes research that links work and family roles through expansionist theory or role balance (Barnett, 1999; Marks & MacDermid, 1996).

Placing Providing in Context

Without a set of common norms for fatherhood, provider role expectations have diversified across different contexts. Cazenave (1984) indicated that provider roles are socially constructed through negotiation of various contexts. He argued, “Only by placing masculine role perceptions within the appropriate social context will it be possible to fully comprehend why men act the way they do and under what conditions they might be expected to change” (p. 655).
In effect, the decontextualization of providing masks qualitatively different opportunities for men to be providers for their families.

Changing family structures, such as the emergence of blended families, have further obscured set expectations for male providers (Amato, 1998; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Consideration of poor and working fathers’ transitions in and out of family households and relationships offer new insights into how provider roles may emerge (Johnson, 2000; Johnson & Doolittle, 1996). Researchers have only recently focused on nonresidential fathers, who are underrepresented in most studies of poor families (Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Hanson, 1998).

Transitions in and out of jobs also directly shape expectations for providing. Edin and Nelson (2001) found that postindustrial jobs have gone “underground” for many low-income fathers, and that there remain important racial differences in the participation of men in formal and informal economies. Despite the central importance of work to men’s self and moral worth (Furstenberg, 1995; Wilson 1996), “there were differences in how [Black and White] men see their world and the appropriate strategies for operating within it” (Cazenave, 1984, p. 650). These differences include extent of paternal engagement, responsibilities of the provider role, and masculinity conceptualization.

Due to lack of job networks, information about changing technologies, and educational opportunities, many fathers struggle for years to find a pathway to legitimate full-time wage labor (MacLeod, 1995; Newman, 1999). Low-income fathers and fathers of color exhibit both disengaged and nuanced paternal involvement shaped by poor job opportunities, crime, and limited educational opportunities (Hamer, 2001; Sullivan, 1992, 1993) and by efforts to attain respectability by being “responsible” for children (Bourgois, 1996; Duneier, 1992). Historically,
these men have searched for alternatives to the good provider role, maintaining contact and spending time with children, offering in-kind materials such as diapers or food, and connecting children to paternal kin who can act as resources (Stier & Tienda, 1993).

Providing therefore touches on men’s ability to provide not just financial capital, but also to create human and social capital (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Provider roles matter—but how, and in which contexts? In this analysis, I explore the process of construction of provider role expectations. I compare and contrast the providing experiences of 46 disadvantaged fathers from multiple Ohio cities; I examine how specific contexts may lead to different expectations for economic providing. In this way, provider role expectations can discourage as well as encourage men to become not only fathers, but involved fathers.

The Nurturant Father

By the 1970s, the ideal of the “nurturant” father had emerged, although not necessarily for the first time in history (LaRossa et al., 1991). This new focus for fathering was in response to several factors requiring men to be more personally involved in daily care-giving to children (Dudley & Stone, 2001). Those factors included a declining birth rate, declining wages for many men, and increasing workforce participation of women (Doherty, et al., 1998; LaRossa et al., 1991; Teachman et al., 2000). The expectation that men will participate in childrearing continues today. Men are encouraged to help the child’s mother care for the child’s direct needs, as well as be involved in maintaining the house and scheduling family appointments and events. This cultural shift has led to an increase in the literature on father involvement and to concern
over child outcomes, especially with nonresidential fathers and their children. In reality, relatively few fathers have significantly increased their levels of direct care giving (Mintz, 1998).

Authors continue to call for more historical studies of fathering (Abramovitch, 1997; LaRossa et al., 1991; Mintz, 1998). Much more data are needed to draw any reliable conclusions, particularly when it comes to fathers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The history of the fathering role is very complex, as are contemporary discussions about what fathers should be doing for their children. Because the role of fathers has varied so much in the past, perhaps we should not expect today’s fathers to fill a single role. More historical data will shed light on this very important national discussion (Mintz, 1998).

**Fathering in the 21st Century**

To understand fathering in the 21st century, it is necessary to consider the context in which fathers live (Lamb, 2000). This context includes changing economic indicators for men and women, changes in family structure and processes that impact fathering, and changes in what society expects of fathers. Fathering behavior is linked to a man’s personal traits, but is also partially determined by family and social forces impacting his thoughts and decisions about the fathering role (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Every parent depends on, and is affected by, his or her social context. For a variety of reasons, this appears to be particularly true of fathers (Doherty et al., 1998).
**The Economic Context**

The economic context for fathering is very important. Today, as in the past, society views breadwinning as one of the main tasks of fatherhood (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). However, in recent years the U.S. economy has made it more difficult for fathers to fulfill that role. In the 1990’s men’s workforce participation declined slightly (White & Rogers, 2000). Additionally, men’s workforce participation has decreased from 80% in 1960 to 71% in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). This sample includes men who are at least 18 years of age. This decrease has not only been attributed to an unstable economy, but an increase in female participation in the workforce. In addition, while skilled jobs provided good pay and minimum wage service sector jobs were being created, there were fewer good jobs in between. Manufacturing jobs, which historically enabled men to provide for a family, continued to decrease in number (White & Rogers, 2000). Recently, the number of manufacturing jobs has decreased sharply from around 17,000,000 in 2001 to around 15,000,000 in 2003 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004).

Conversely, economic prospects have continued to improve for women (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; White & Rogers, 2000). More and more women are moving into the labor force, and their wages relative to men continue to increase (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). In fact, many families stayed out of poverty in the 1990s because of a wife’s income (White & Rogers, 2000). Even for many higher income families, wives’ income has become necessary to maintain their current standard of living or to become upwardly mobile. Married couple families used to make more money than single-headed families because a male
breadwinner was present. Now, it is much more likely that they make more money due to the presence of a working wife (White & Rogers, 2000).

Although many dual-earner families have greatly benefited from the wife’s income, this arrangement has challenged the breadwinning role of the husband (Jarrett et al., 2002; White & Rogers, 2000). As wives spend more time at work, and their income continues to increase, they often expect husbands to increase their level of housework and childcare. Men, however, often resist this shift perceived shift in parenting role expectations. They may consider domestic duties “women’s work,” or they might resent losing some of their leisure time. Either way, moving away from breadwinning and toward housework and childcare confuses the already shifting fatherhood role (Garbarino, 2000). Although this shift in gender roles tends to increase marital satisfaction for women, it tends to decrease marital satisfaction for men (Amato et al., 2003).

**Changing Family Demographics**

The changing demography of the family unit is another factor impacting fathering in the United States (Dudley & Stone, 2001; Gupta, Smock, & Manning, 2004; Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). The divorce rate remains close to 50% for first time marriages, with mothers still gaining custody of children the vast majority of the time. In recent decades there has been a sharp rise in cohabitation rates, along with a steady decline in early marriages. In 1970, the median age at first marriage was 23 for men and 21 for women. In 2000, the median age was 27 for men and 25 for women (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Both of these trends tend to increase the incidence of non-marital births. At this point in history, half of all Caucasian
children, and around two-thirds of all African-American children will spend part of their childhood in a single parent home (Dudley & Stone, 2001).

Some researchers, with the aforementioned statistics in mind, have argued that the family is in decline, and that the fathering role is being diminished (Blankenhorn, 1996; Popenoe, 1996). Others take the view that recent demographic shifts may be harmless or even better for the family because they are more likely to result in higher levels of education, better jobs, and more economic stability for the family. The real question concerns the role of the father in the modern American family. Confusion over what that role should be contributes to our collective anxiety about so many “fatherless” children, and how this situation may affect children and families (Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002).

In spite of these enormous social and economic changes, it is reasonable to expect fathers to adjust to this new reality. Many fathers could embrace a more nurturing role. If these changes are to take place, several things need to happen. First, researchers must stay abreast of the needs of fathers so they can be properly supported in their efforts to be responsible for children. Second, U.S. society needs to work on a more precise “script” for the fathering role so that it is less ambiguous and therefore easier to enact (Garbarino, 2000). Finally, researchers, practitioners, and anyone else involved with families, should build a more welcoming social climate for fathers where they are honored as important in the lives of children and encouraged to take an active role in their child’s development.
The Current State of Fatherhood Research

The literature on fatherhood is complex, abundant, and diverse. Researchers have investigated the topic from a variety a vantage points, and in conjunction with a variety of important social, cultural, and economic issues. Researchers are faced with a number of challenges due to the charged political nature of the topic, and the large number of stakeholders interested in fathers and fathering behavior (Cabrera & Peters, 2000). Fathering is a concern for fathers’ rights groups, feminists, child advocacy groups, politicians, and nearly everyone else concerned about families and children, since the behavior of fathers has been linked to child outcomes. Fortunately, many authors from a number of different disciplines are conducting research on a variety of fathering topics (Catlett & McKenry, 2004; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Varying Perspectives on Fatherhood Research

With the growth and maturation that fathering literature has experienced, researchers are approaching the field from a number of different perspectives, including historical, conceptual, and theoretical (Doherty et al., 1998; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). As discussed previously, some authors are working to put the father’s role in historical context. This information is important for the national discussion about what a father’s roles should be. Other researchers are working to revise and expand certain fathering concepts, most notably the concept of father involvement (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). Since much of the previous work on fathers was empirically driven, researchers are now building theoretical frameworks for fathering experiences and behavior (Doherty et al., 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000).
**Child Outcomes**

In recent years there has been considerable research on positive outcomes for children whose fathers become ‘involved’ in their care. (Marsiglio et al., 2000). This topic is of great importance due to the large number of children who will spend at least part of their childhood living apart from their fathers (Cabrera & Peters, 2000). This topic also draws attention because of the need for fathers in intact families to spend more time in direct contact with children, due to mothers’ increased workforce participation (Doherty et al., 1998). This part of the fathering literature is politically charged, has important implications for social policy, and is a result of several of the most fundamental social changes of the last few decades. For these reasons, this topic will continue to be studied and make up a large portion of the fathering literature (Cabrera & Peters, 2000).

**Research on Father Involvement**

When it comes to research on father involvement, there is great variation from one study to the next in design, method, and measures (Pleck, 1997). Some of this research is qualitative, some is quantitative, and some studies include both methods. A number of studies are strictly empirical, while others have a strong theoretical foundation. Some research efforts are based on mothers’ reports while others are based on fathers’ reports. Some of the data sets are based on local samples and are disproportionately white and middle-class, while others include national samples, or make an attempt to gather data from a diverse population. Most notably, there is great variation from one study to the next in how father involvement is conceptualized and measured. There is a major thrust by family researchers, state and federal governments, and
policy makers to develop an adequate father involvement instrument that takes into account everything a father does with his children, not just direct contact and care.

An additional challenge is that many of the questions researchers would like to ask fathers are rather sensitive, raising concerns about the validity of responses. Questionable data also arise when fathers report differently than mothers or children on variables such as father involvement, amount of financial support, or the quality of the father-child relationship (Eggebeen, 2002). Recent work on fathering has addressed some of these challenges. For example, several authors have released a new measure of father involvement that takes into account a father’s direct contact with children, as well as other dimensions of involvement such as setting rules and limits for children’s behavior and knowing where the children are and what activities they do with their friends (Hawkins et al., 2002).

**Measuring Father Involvement**

Much of the literature focuses on father involvement in intact families. For example, Harris and Morgan (1991) studied differential father involvement with sons and daughters. The data on father involvement came from a short measure (6 items) that included both behavioral and affective components. The aim of this study was to measure the components of the “new nurturant role” for fathers. McBride and Rane (1997) interviewed mothers and fathers using Lamb and colleagues’ categories of parental involvement (interaction, accessibility, and responsibility). In a more recent study, Rane and McBride (2000) again used this three-category format for involvement, but cautioned that broader conceptualizations were on the horizon, due to a recent recognition that fathers provide more for their children than merely income and direct
care. Pasley and colleagues (2002) measured father involvement with an 11-item scale consisting of different child-related tasks and responsibilities. This study focused on fathers’ level of involvement, or performance in the fathering role, as related to the concepts of “commitment” and “psychological centrality.”

A pivotal study by Furstenberg and Nord (1985) conceptualized nonresidential parental involvement as amount of contact in general, frequency of telephone calls and letters, and quality of the parent-child relationship. The involvement measure allowed the authors to gain information about topics such as “activities with parents in the last month” and “number of times child sleeps over at nonresidential parent’s house” (p.895). Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Charng (1989) explored the relationship between divorced fathers’ visits with their children and payment of child support. Father involvement was defined as frequency of visitation and amount of child support paid. Using a national data set, Seltzer and Brandreth (1994) measured nonresidential father involvement, conceptualized as social contact and economic involvement, including child support payments and other financial transfers to the mothers of their children. Using a current national data set, Hofferth, Pleck, Stueve, Bianchi, & Sayer (2002) presented information on nonresidential father involvement, such as how money is spent on the child, how much time the father spends with the child, and the quality of the father-child relationship.

Another study conducted by Minton and Pasley (1996) compared father involvement for divorced, nonresidential and non-divorced fathers. The father involvement scale was an adaptation of Ahrons’ (1983) measure, and included questions about how often fathers participated in a number of different activities with children, such as helping with schoolwork and visiting nonresidential children. A recent study conducted by Fox and Bruce (2001)
interviewed any man who identified himself as a father. Based on extensive fieldwork, the father involvement measure consisted of 4 categories: responsivity, harshness, behavioral engagement, and affective involvement.

The cross sectional design of the research also prevents researchers from examining generational differences that would determine whether a certain population of fathers is becoming more or less involved through time (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). An additional problem is the lack of a measure that could be applied appropriately to fathers in different situations, whether cohabiting, divorced and nonresident, or married and residing with his children (Hawkins et al., 2002). Until researchers can develop a comprehensive measure of father involvement that is inclusive of all fathers, many important questions will remain unanswered (Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002).

**Identifying and Characterizing Father Involvement**

**Fathering Behavior**

An important question that recent research has tried to address is: What are adequate levels of father involvement, and how is it measured? One reason father involvement is measured so differently from one study to the next has to do with American society’s definition of good fathering. Because our culture has not yet agreed on what fathers should be doing for or with their children, it is very difficult to create a measure of involvement that has any real meaning. Many authors have pointed out the tension between what fathers currently do for children, and what society expects them to do (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Daly, 1995; Draper, 1998; Kissman, 1997; Peterson & Steinmetz, 2000). Societal expectations of fathers
now include both breadwinning and direct care of children, along with related household duties (Silverstein, 1996; Teachman et al., 2000). A relatively small number of men are meeting these expectations (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Peterson & Steinmetz, 2000). If social norms indicate that fathers should spend much of their time in direct care giving capacities, then any valid measure of involvement would put these activities at the center. However, if social norms direct fathers to also support their children in more indirect ways, such as providing money or access to extended family networks, then the involvement measure would have to be much more comprehensive (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Hawkins et al., 2002; Palkovitz, 2002).

There are many stakeholders interested in redefining fatherhood, including social scientists, politicians, parents’ rights groups, and the judicial system (Doherty, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Many writers agree that, along with the recent changes in gender roles for women, society would benefit from updated fathering roles (Palkovitz, 2002; Pasley & Minton, 1997; Silverstein, 1996). For example, Silverstein (1996) points out that if fathering could be altered to include more nurturing and care taking, this change would benefit women by reducing their workload. This change could also benefit men, by aiding their personal development, and by providing a more realistic and less oppressive set of gender roles for men.

While studying fathers and families in different cultural contexts, social scientists accentuate the point that fathering is a set of socially constructed roles, rather than a static historical or moral imperative (Allen & Connor, 1997; Hewlett, 2000; Townsend, 2002). They lend an important perspective to the national debate about fathering, since they recognize that fathers may play a number of different roles that may be important in children’s development. For example, Townsend (2002) suggests that instead of expecting fathers to enact a strict set of
gender roles, society should consider not only how fathers interact directly with children, but also what else they can provide. For example, in many countries around the world, fathers provide for children by ensuring their participation in extended family networks. He also suggests that when searching for a definition of fatherhood, we should take into account the larger social context for child development. Fathers are not the only men involved in caring for children, and what they do provide is partially determined by familial, social, cultural, and economic circumstances.

The Evolution of Father Involvement Measures

A broader definition of fatherhood will naturally lead to a more comprehensive measure of father involvement (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Recent efforts to expand the father involvement measure have been successful. For example, Palkovitz (1997) has enumerated 15 different categories of father involvement. These include communication, teaching, monitoring, thought processes, errands, caregiving, child-related maintenance, shared interests, availability, planning, shared activities, providing, affection, protection, and supporting emotionally. Also, a number of researchers have developed the Inventory of Father Involvement, which takes into account most of these categories (Hawkins et al., 2002) and, like the Palkovitz measure, offers a broader conceptualization of father involvement.

It is my belief that the Inventory of Father Involvement, and like-minded categorizations, afford policy makers, law makers, and researchers the opportunity to explore various realms of fathering outside of solely economic provisions. Additionally it allows for the empirical knowledge of fatherhood to be expounded upon, and in clinical and social settings (fatherhood
programs, etc.). This would benefit disadvantaged fathers in allowing them to analyze their strengths and weaknesses as fathers within a context that they prioritize. It would also allow for researchers to establish a more direct linkage between the potential for dissonance between traditional gender roles, primary family relationship roles, and caregiving roles as well as how the competing demands of these roles are navigated by disadvantaged fathers.

**Father Involvement and Child Outcomes**

Development theorists tell us that the formation of relationships between father and child depends both on the quality and the amount of interaction between the two sides. As a result, researchers place great importance on formulating an appropriate measure of father involvement because father involvement is directly related to a host of child outcomes. In fact, concern about child development is at the heart of much of the research on father involvement and fathering in general. Research conducted over the past 40 years consistently shows that father involvement in intact families directly affects child outcomes (Amato, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002). However, only limited evidence suggests that nonresidential fathers can contribute to healthy child development (Lamb, 2002; Stewart, 2003). This is partly due to the fact that needed data are simply not available at this time. In addition, existing studies show mixed results, perhaps because of the many barriers a nonresidential father must overcome in order to engage in meaningful parenting. Father-child relationships are believed to have substantial importance in the formative and subsequent years of the child.
Diversity of Fathering Contexts

Fathering in Two-Parent Families

Fathers in two-parent families have much to offer their children. Well known, and often sighted research has demonstrated that paternal involvement can reduce behavioral problems (Amato & Rivera, 1999), increase social competence (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001), improve self-esteem (Deutsch et al., 2001), and even protect against poor mental health later in life (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Father involvement in two-parent families can also positively impact cognitive development (Radin, 1986), school performance (Palkovitz, 2002), and overall well being (Amato, 1998).

This research also indicates that, on average, children who grow up in families with both their biological parents in a low-conflict marriage are better off in a number of ways than children who grow up in step- or cohabiting-parent households. Compared to children who are raised by their married parents, children in other family types are more likely to achieve lower levels of education, to become teen parents, and to experience health, behavior, and mental health problems. And children in single- and cohabiting-parent families are more likely to be poor (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Nonresidential Fathering

The connection between nonresidential father involvement and positive child outcomes is more tenuous. Only limited research has been conducted in this arena. In addition, external factors can make it very difficult for nonresidential fathers to actively parent their children. Even
so, previous research has demonstrated that nonresidential father involvement is associated with children’s increased social competence and academic achievement (Caldwell, Wright, Zimmerman, Walsemann, Williams, & Isichei, 2004; Dudley & Stone, 2001; King, 1994). In addition, higher levels of nonresidential father involvement are associated with lower levels of depression in children (Stewart, 1999). Green & Moore (2000) use early descriptive data from the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS) Child Outcome Study, a sub-study of the larger random assignment evaluation of the Federal JOBS program, to determine what factors predict father involvement among nonresident fathers of young children who receive welfare? And is nonresident father involvement associated with better outcomes for these children? This study showed that nonresidential father involvement can contribute to a home environment that encourages important cognitive stimulation. Similarly, Amato (1998) found that nonresidential father involvement can improve a child’s overall health, nutrition, and educational attainment.

There are two main factors that help determine a nonresidential father’s success in supporting the positive development of a child. First, the father must have a high quality relationship with the child where he engages in active, authoritative parenting (Amato, 1998; Stewart, 1999; Stewart, 2003). This is a major challenge for most nonresidential fathers, given the lack of regular time with the child. Second, the father must engage in this quality parenting in a context of low conflict with the child’s mother (Hetherington, 2002; King & Heard, 1999; Lamb, 2002). This is another major challenge for fathers due to the combative nature of many post-divorce relationships (Dudley, 1991; Dudley & Stone, 2001).
Much more research is needed in the area of nonresidential father involvement and child outcomes (Lamb, 2002). The only conclusive finding thus far is that these fathers can benefit their children by paying child support (Stewart, 2003). Ideally, an appropriate measure of father involvement would be developed and specific components of involvement would be linked to specific outcomes for children (Graham & Beller, 2002; Green & Moore, 2000). This type of progress would pave the way for helpful suggestions for fathers who are attempting to support the positive development of their nonresidential children.

**Effects of Involvement on Father Outcomes**

Most research on fatherhood has concentrated on determining what men do, and whether and how these activities affect children. Children whose fathers are involved in rearing them fare better on cognitive tests and in language ability than those with less responsive or involved fathers. Improved cognitive abilities are associated with higher educational achievement. Fathers being involved in their children’s lives also protects against risk factors that pose harm for children (such as problematic behavior, maternal depression and family economic hardship). Very little research has been conducted that addresses how father involvement with children impacts father outcomes (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Nock, 1998). This gap in the literature is unfortunate not only because it ignores the needs of fathers, but also because well adjusted and highly functioning fathers are more likely to relate positively to their children. They can be expected to relate more positively to the child’s mother as well, an important factor in determining the father’s success in nonresidential parenting (Arendell, 1995; Braver & Griffin, 2000; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).
Research suggests that involvement with children benefits not only the child, but fathers and mothers as well. When fathers build strong relationships with their children they receive support and caring in return. Being involved in their children’s’ lives helps fathers: (1) enjoy a secure attachment relationship with their children, (2) cope well with stressful situations and everyday hassles, (3) feel as if they can depend on others more, (4) feel more comfortable in their occupation and feel that they can do their job well, (5) feel confident they have a lot to offer others in terms of their job skills, parenting skills, and social relationships (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Mothers also experience benefits from having an involved father. These benefits come from having loving and nurturing relationships among family members, not only between parents and children, but between a spouse, partner, or relative. Being involved in caring for the child can bring greater harmony and fewer arguments.

Divorced, nonresidential fathers have smaller family networks and social networks, compared to fathers in intact families (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001), may be more depressed than married fathers (Shapiro & Lambert, 1999), and may be dealing with considerable guilt and anger concerning the details of their divorce proceedings (Dudley, 1991; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Also, low levels of involvement with children may impede a father’s psychosocial development (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Scholars have pointed out that the amount of time spent with children aids a father’s developing ability to care for the next generation (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Snarey, 1993).

More research on father outcomes will be conducted, as scholars increasingly recognize the challenging situation many nonresidential fathers face. The literature on nonresidential fathering has moved from a focus on father “absence” and “dead-beat dads,” to a realization that
many factors contribute to what appears to be low levels of nonresidential father involvement (Bruce & Fox, 1999; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Stewart, 1999). Future research should determine exactly what those factors are, and develop models that explain and predict father involvement (Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995).
CHAPTER 3

DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

As I theorized about the men in this study, I aim to advance knowledge of how disadvantaged men construct, express, and negotiate their identities as current and/or active fathers. My goal is not to estimate how many disadvantaged men are fathers or want to be fathers. Such questions are best left for studies based on large, statistically representative samples. Therefore, this study is limited in its ability to generalize results with confidence to all disadvantaged men. It explores disadvantaged men’s inner worlds with respect to fatherhood consciousness and perceived barriers presented by the provider role. Hence, a qualitative methodological approach is most appropriate to study the processes by which disadvantaged men become aware and express their procreative consciousness, as qualitative methods are sensitive to the distinctive quality of different life experiences, the contextual nature of knowledge, the production of meaning, and the interactive character of human action.

The knowledge from this study emerged through interplay between my participants and myself throughout every phase of the research process. I used the methodological strategy of intensive interviews, and information emerged through conversation and dialogue. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, I treated my project as a loosely structured and evolving process whereby theoretical ideas were generated from the conversations I had with participants.
My ideas were shaped and reshaped throughout the course of the research through a process of “gradual induction” and “gradual deduction” and interview questions were altered as novel ideas surfaced.

Sample and Recruitment

My analysis drew upon digitally recorded, in-depth interviews with a sample of 46 fathers. All of varying levels of education, age, marital status, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. I use a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure the selection of information-rich cases for detailed examination. Information-rich cases are those from which the researcher can learn a significant amount with regards to issues of central importance, depending on the purpose of the researcher (Patton, 1990). The purposeful inclusion of both married and non-married fathers; and men of various ages should not be viewed as a strategy to compare these two groups of men. Rather it was a methodological tactic employed to better understand how emerging social structural opportunities, shifting constraints, and historical developments shape the process of disadvantaged men’s reproductive decision-making and fathering experiences throughout their life course.

I recruited through a variety of methods in diverse locales from July 2006 - July 2009. Recruitment began with acquaintances of mine from a previous research study completed while working on my master’s thesis. These individuals defined themselves as disadvantaged men who were fathers at the time of the interview. To limit the sample’s homogeneity, I recruited participants in four different cities; Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Dayton, Ohio. The initial participants resulted from men I came into contact with by way of my work with the Ohio
Commission on Fatherhood (OCF) and our subsequent grantees. I recruited via a letter. Information about the study was spread throughout the Ohio State University campus area, OCF and OCF grantee meetings and activities, as well as the greater Columbus area. The letter described the nature and purpose of the study. It was a broad call for participants who might be interested in discussing their thoughts about fatherhood and the provider role, screening them for whether they actually had children.

The letter outlined criteria for involvement as well as my contact information. Participants responded by indicating their intent to participate via the telephone, email, or in person. Upon this initial contact, the potential participant was informed of the nature of the study and given a brief screening interview to ensure that the specific participant met the outlined criteria. Following the screening process, the potential participant was asked if he was still interested in partaking in the study. If the potential participant agreed, I collected contact information and scheduled an interview for a later date. As I ended each interview, I inquired if the participant had any friends or acquaintances that fit the criteria and might be willing to participate in my research. This recruitment strategy of sending out letters and snowball sampling was a highly useful tactic for recruiting seven disadvantaged fathers in Dayton; five in Cincinnati, six in Cleveland, and twenty-eight in Columbus.

**Participants**

The group of disadvantaged fathers had substantial variety (see appendix D for demographic information). The demographic data depicted in the table are pieces of my recruitment strategies and should not be regarded as substantive findings of my research. The
participants were racially, ethnically, and economically diverse. Nineteen of these men were Black, five were multi-racial, two were Native American/American Indian, eight were Hispanic, eleven were Caucasian, and one was foreign-born. Twelve participants had not completed high school, thirty-two possessed a high school diploma or GED, and two had at least some college. The participants’ religious affiliations included Jewish, Presbyterian, Christian, Catholic, Buddhist and Hindu; some reported having no religious affiliation. Their occupations varied from being unemployed to working in: the service industry (food and beverage and cosmetology), the non-profit sector, child care, as auto mechanics and within the plumbing industry. The income for these men ranged from $10,000 to $24,000 annually. Ages of the men ranged from 18-55 and the median age was 34. Consistent with other research on disadvantaged fathers the fathers participating in my research were predominantly non-white and lower class to working class.

Participants created their families in diverse ways. Some men were married, while others were solely dating and/or cohabitating. Some men were co-parenting with the women and defined themselves as fathers in this context. Other men entered into fatherhood as a result of a one night stand or an unplanned birth. Two men became fathers via marriage, acquiring step-children and two became fathers through adoption or fostering, with the public foster care system which resulted in legal adoption. One unfortunate aspect of my research is that my participants’ father identities and provider role negotiations are not only products of their class status(es), but also their race/ethnic identities. This is unfortunate because it makes it difficult to distinguish if their race/ethnic identity, or their disadvantaged status, has the biggest impact on their decision to parent, provide, or a combination of the two.
Interviews

My research methodology entailed in-depth semi-structured interviews with 46 fathers. Participants were encouraged to discuss their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and personal narratives as they relate to their own feelings and conversations with others with regard to fatherhood decisions.

Interviews took place in a variety of settings, depending on the participant’s preference. Such settings included participants’ households, work offices, coffee shops, eating and drinking establishments, or my office. Two were conducted over the telephone. Interviews were digitally recorded and lasted between 55-170 minutes. Interviews were supplemented with a biographical questionnaire asking the participants a handful of questions focusing on their biographical information, such as age, race/ethnicity, nationality, and relationship status (see appendix A). All participants were administered informed consent. Prior to the initiation of each interview, I explained the nature of the project to each participant, conveyed the importance of the study, and requested permission to record the interview. Each participant was informed of his right to refuse to answer any question that he felt was too personal, inappropriate, or that made him uncomfortable. He was also informed of his right to terminate the interview at any time if he so desired. None of the 46 participants refused to answer any question or opted to terminate the interview at any time. Following each interview, I wrote brief notes to myself detailing the major themes that surfaced in our conversation. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim.
Constructing the Interview Guide

In order to ensure that all topics of interest were addressed in the interviews, I structured the interview guide (see appendix B) around various “sensitizing concepts” (van den Hoonard, 1997). Sensitizing concepts are theoretical tools that emphasize the distinctive properties that may be associated with a class of data—in this case, disadvantaged men’s parenting decisions and motivations. These concepts offer researchers a general sense of reference and orientation without constraining new paths for theoretical discovery. Viewed broadly, they also refer to concepts that may have been generated from other research or theoretical speculation. The use of such sensitizing concepts should not be confused with definitive concepts, in that sensitizing concepts do not create closure, rather they provide a general source of guidance.

In their 2002 work *Sex, Men, and Babies* Marsiglio and Hutchinson utilize sensitizing concepts in their discussion on young men and fathers including: procreative consciousness, turning points, fatherhood readiness, fatherhood responsibility, possible selves, fathering visions, and child visions. I borrow some of these concepts and attempt to expand them. In addition to borrowing the model developed by Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002), I expand it specifically to the experiences of disadvantaged men and extract other sensitizing concepts from relevant literature. These novel concepts included the dual marginalization of disadvantaged fatherhood, myths surrounding disadvantaged fathers, individual hardships, and institutional constraints. These concepts were used as primary guides for conversation and analysis. Although I used the sensitizing concepts, I was also consciously reflexive in order to avoid the trap of forcing the data into preconceived categories. These initial categories were conceptual guides to frame my research without constraining it.
Active Interviewing

It has been suggested by qualitative sociological researchers and ethnographers that interviews are not necessarily neutral and unbiased tools. Their belief has been that the interview process is a pipeline through which information is transmitted from a passive subject to an active researcher. However, Holstein & Gumbrium (1995) spoke of the interview as a setting in which both parties actively construct a unique social situation. They coined this as the “active interview.” The active interview considers interviewers and interviewees as equal partners in constructing meaning around an interview. This interpretation changes a range of elements in the interview process - from the way of conceiving a sample to the ways in which the interview may be conducted and the results analyzed. In their guide, Holstein & Gubrium outline the differences between active and traditional interviews and give researchers clear guidelines on conducting a successful interview.

The active interview illuminates the interplay of constructivism with the practicality of the interpretive resources at hand according to Holstein & Gubrium. In the active approach, the participant is not a passive vessel of knowledge, but is instead somewhat of a researcher in their own right, “consulting repertoires of experience and orientations, linking fragments into patterns, and offering theoretically coherent descriptions, accounts, and explorations”. According to Holstein & Gubrium the participant is the narrator, or storyteller, of their multi-faceted experience and calls upon different stocks of knowledge depending on which experience or position is activated.

Active interviewing is especially useful here given that historical, political, social, cultural, and economic contexts are consistently intertwined within participants’ narratives. In
the interview setting, the fathers spoke of constructing their families, an approach which usually paved the way for chronological description. However, inquiring about a participant’s past does not necessarily invoke an objective and ahistorical discussion of the participant’s past experiences; rather, the past is intimately linked with the present. In other words, the participant and I were mutually involved in activating different aspects of the participant’s stock of knowledge. For example, when I encouraged a father who had multiple children to discuss thoughts he had about becoming a father for a second time, he drew upon past thoughts and began to narrate past experiences and thoughts through his present standpoint as a father. When I spoke with a father with only one child and inquired as to what his thoughts are on becoming a father, he recounted a vision of the future through his past standpoint as a childless man. The active interviewing approach sheds light on how the participant’s future, or history, is a “future-in-the-making” or a “history-in-the-making” event, complexly unfolding in relation to that participant’s present standpoint (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Whether we were talking about visions of a future or recollections of the past, the active approach allowed me to see how these were just as much versions of the present as they were memories and foresights.

The active approach to interviewing also allows me to understand how conceptualizations of the present depend upon the different stocks of knowledge my participants call upon. By treating the interviews as active processes I am able to encourage and appreciate participants’ shifting standpoints. Moreover, I am presented with the unique ability to explore the distinct and sometimes conflicting reserves of knowledge that they may call upon to explain and understand their experiences as fathers. Rather than searching for one single truth or one answer, the active interview capitalizes on the diverse stories of participants to get a more complete (yet still
(partial) understanding of how these men navigate their way through fatherhood and conflicts with the provider role.

Within the active interview both the interviewer and the participant are actively involved in the construction of knowledge. According to Holstein & Gubrium, it is important to remember that the interviewer does far more than ask questions; he “activates narrative production” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 39). It is the interviewer’s task to guide and channel the participant’s narratives to the research at hand. Unlike the positivist interviewer, the active interviewer is not reprimanded for invoking a certain vocabulary to guide the participant to speak in terms of the research at hand. In my interviews, I purposely invoked the language of turning points in order to encourage my participants to imagine certain events in their lives that were central in triggering their father identities to demonstrate their conflicts with the provider role. I am not dictating how my participants’ lives are to be portrayed, nor am I contaminating my findings. Rather, I recognize that in my role as collaborator I can guide my participants as to keep our speech on “narrative course” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 50).

Also, within the active approach reflexivity is paramount. In the active approach, both, the interviewer and the participant are mutually engaged in a process of reflexivity (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In my interviews, I always inquire as to what else I should be asking regarding these men’s experiences as fathers. My participants have filled me in on aspects of their lives that I would have never imagined to ask or even consider had I been limited to a structured and positivist format. The active interviewing approach also illuminates how the inclusion of multivocality (many voices) shapes the interview process and the subsequent knowledge that emerges from this process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The multivocality within the active
interview process allows for new and rich linkages of “horizons of meaning” to emerge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

**Interviewer Acceptance and Assimilation**

Because I am not a father myself, there was always the risk of being an outsider or being regarded as “the other” by the men I interviewed. I was consciously aware of the possibility that these men might not trust me, and because of the sensitive nature of this study, might feel as if I am judging them. Thus, to counteract these potential risks, I attempted to make the men as comfortable as possible by using strategies common to qualitative researchers. First, I tried to conduct interviews in a private and comfortable setting. Whereas most of these men’s interviews took place in private residences or my office, a few also took place in public places (restaurants, coffee shops, etc.). The interviews that did take place in public places were conducted in alcoves or semi-private areas of the establishment. While conducting these interviews in public spaces, I would always offer the men the opportunity to refuse to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable responding to or encouraged participants to speak in a low voice. None of the participants who were interviewed in public places stopped the interview at any time, although some, at various points in the interview did lower their voices ensuring that other patrons did not overhear our conversation.

In my attempts to ensure that the interview setting was regarded as a safe space for these men to tell me their stories, all participants, regardless of the interview location were given time to read over informed consent and were encouraged to ask questions about my study. I always provided my participants the opportunity to ask me questions and at the end of the interview.
asked them to share their thoughts with me about their reactions to our conversation. None of the participants replied that they felt uncomfortable talking to me at any time. When I specifically asked if they would have felt more comfortable speaking with an interviewer of a different gender, race, or age none mentioned that any of my personal characteristics hindered the interview or their disclosure. Interestingly, a few participants responded that my identity as an African American male was helpful in finding a common ground, in that I understood the nuances of being an African American male, and possibly disadvantaged. These nuances were said to be a result of the stereotypical imagery of African American males that existed in American society.

A significant advantage of speaking with participants of a social group that I am not a member of is that I have absolutely no personal or experiential knowledge of what it is like to experience life as a father. Although I will never know for sure, I believe that I received a more detailed explanation of these men’s lives than another interviewer would have because of my sex. Although my racial identity certainly influenced the outcome of my interviews, I believe that this effect was minimal and beneficial in terms of my non-white respondents. Moreover, I maintain that my personal characteristics, in particular, my ability to facilitate trust, rapport, and open dialogue in the interviews helped to mitigate my “outsider” status.

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory

I assessed interviews using a grounded theory approach, an inductive approach to data analysis designed to highlight emergent themes in participant narratives (Glaser and Strauss
1967; Glaser 1978, 1992; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Thus, the initial textual material was analyzed with grounded theory methodology for qualitative data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using a grounded theory approach means that in coding the interviews, I did not set out with the purpose of simply confirming the presence, or lack thereof, of cognitive dissonance among participants. Rather, constant comparison of participant responses allowed me to identify emergent themes regarding disadvantaged fathers’ experiences of fatherhood and processing provider role conflicts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The emerging themes represent actual lived experiences and cognitive processes as reported by the interviewees. After identifying the major themes in the narratives, I then recoded the interviews, comparing individual responses to theoretical patterns suggested by the original coding.

Consistent with the grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. My aim for this study was significantly more modest than what is expected in traditional grounded theory, in that my overarching goal was not the generation of a theory with explicit dimensions and properties. I sought a more nuanced understanding of disadvantaged men’s provider role decision-making and fatherhood experiences. I employ the process of grounded theory methodology for the main reason that Marsiglio (2004) mentions in *Step Dads: Stories of Love, Hope, and Repair*. The process of grounded theory analysis allowed me to “deepen, expand, integrate, and ground in empirical data previously proposed theoretical notions” (p. 261) concerning men as fathers and to generate new theoretical concepts and ideas for the specific experience of disadvantaged fathers. My aim, then, was not to develop a complete grounded theory, but rather to expand on already existing theoretical frameworks for understanding how disadvantaged men develop, negotiate, and express their fathering identities.
and fathering experiences in a socially-constructed world that promotes and endorses provider
based fathering.

I use the constant comparative process of comparing incident with incident, category with
incident, and category with category. As ideas, terms, moods, and the like surfaced in multiple
interviews, they were coded and given tentative labels during the open phase of coding. Open
coding is a process of comparing concepts found in the text for classification as examples of
some phenomenon. As I noticed similarities in experience, patterns, and emergent themes,
categories of phenomena were labeled in the margins and entered into a code list. This process
of open coding enabled me to create an analytic process for identifying key categories and their
properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Core, or central, categories were the roots that anchored
their properties. For example, a central category in my research is provider role conflicts and
their role in altering father identities, investment, and engagement.

This coding scheme allowed me to label categories and properties that represent distinct
happenings and to describe other instances of the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The
next stage of coding involved axial coding; wherein there is a strong focus on discovering codes
around a single category, such has looking for interactions and strategies that relate to the category
(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding can also be used to develop categories, seeking relationships that
will expose a category. Where open coding is about identification and naming, axial coding is about links
and relationships.

Utilizing axial coding I explored the relationship between and among concepts and began
to construct a theoretical explanation of how disadvantaged men’s provider role decision-making
and fatherhood experiences are, developed, and negotiated (LaRossa, 2005). At this point, I
composed all of the codes into a Word document and began to cut and paste each code into a list. Next, I went through my transcripts electronically and cut and pasted phrases, sentences, and entire paragraphs into folders with separate documents. For example, one folder included various topics, or indicators about changes in provider role expectations. This folder was then linked with another folder that included indicators about changes in the meaning of fatherhood to a broader category labeled, sociohistorical transformations. Sociohistorical transformations became the broader category, and changes in families and changes in meanings of fatherhood were the properties that contributed to broad sociohistorical transformations that have changed how disadvantaged men think about fatherhood.

The purpose of axial coding is to answer questions about the phenomenon in order to give the concept greater explanatory power (Duchscher & Morgan, 2004). The development of axial coding continued as I sought out the processes, conditions, and consequences of identified categories throughout the research process. My final stage of selective coding entailed comparing themes identified in this study to the existing literature exploring fathering. This final coding phase is where I identified the theoretical contributions that ultimately advance our understanding of procreative consciousness and fathering experiences, as they pertain to disadvantaged men. Admittedly, despite the urge to offer readers a step-by-step guide of how I analyzed the data, coding did not occur in distinct phases. Instead, “the picture slowly emerged as a patchwork mosaic” (Dey, 2003, p. 86).

I realize that grounded theory recently has come under attack primarily because of the positivist roots of the methodology, its assumptions of a neutral researcher who discovers data, and because it assumes a reality unique in its characteristics which is only applicable to its
members, and cannot be generalized to non-members (Charmaz, 2000, 2002; Dey, 2003; LaRossa, 2005). Similarly LaRossa (2005) argues that despite their sensitivities to symbolic interactionism, Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin come extremely close to subscribing to epistemological realism, an orientation closely associated with positivism. Hence, it is of importance to note that consistent with the constructivist and interactionist approaches, I emphasize how these categories and codes are not factual realities. Rather they denote a way of asking and seeing, coupled with participants’ ways of experiencing and narrating (Charmaz, 2000, 2002). My categories are not simply products of the data; they emerged through interplay among the mutual construction of the interview and coding process. Nonetheless, the themes derived from this process of mutual construction reveal how disadvantaged men experience fathering in a socially constructed world that promotes provider based fathering.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents the major findings of the current study, based on one-on-one in-depth individual interviews, and biographical questionnaires completed by forty-six fathers in four metropolitan cities in Ohio. A summary of demographic information is also included and an overall thematic analysis of the data is presented. As previously noted, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the provider role on disadvantaged men’s decisions about fatherhood and paternal engagement. Specifically, the researcher was interested in exploring how disadvantaged men interpret, experience, and navigate the provider role, and any barriers it may present them. Again, the present study explored the following research questions:

(1) How do disadvantaged fathers conceptualize the provider role?

(2) What perceived barriers does the provider role present to disadvantaged fathers? And what effect does this have on their involvement in the lives of their children?

(3) Which form of investment, economic or social, do disadvantaged fathers consider most beneficial to their children?
Emergent Themes

An important strength of the in-depth interview is the ability to gather large amounts of data on each participant in the sample. In addition to all of the data that were collected to describe the sample and answer the research questions, propositions, and hypotheses, this data gathering method allowed for additional themes to emerge. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcripts were produced. After extensive review of the individual interview transcripts, the researcher began the analysis process. The first step was to assign codes, or “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The researcher utilized this process to identify and verify emerging categories and themes. Each transcript was read then coded individually. Codes which most accurately represented the sentiment expressed were used (Schwandt, 2001).

Through comparing and contrasting transcripts regarding codes and categories, main themes were identified and linked. Tentative theories were formed regarding plausible relationships or links between emerging categories and themes. This practice continued until theoretical saturation was reached and redundancy occurred (Schwandt, 2001). Throughout the entire analytic process, a 100% coding agreement among the transcripts was required. The final step of coding involved linking these categories, themes and assertions into a theoretical model which attempted to answer the research questions set forth in the present study. These emergent themes are presented one at a time, supported by quotes from the fathers themselves. Within this context, listed below are the themes and subthemes (and their corresponding codes), which are
discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter. Direct excerpts from the transcripts are used to illustrate these emergent themes. As previously noted, the names used are pseudonyms.

(1) The Need to Redefine the Provider Role

Throughout the interview process, fathers consistently expressed the need to redefine the provider role in a wider scope. The inclusion of social (INSOC) and emotional (INEMO) components were mentioned frequently. Subsequently, fathers sought to: (a) prioritize the social and emotional well-being of their children (PSEW); and share the economic provider role responsibilities with their significant other (SPRR). In addition, fathers sought to no longer be marginalized within the environment of fathering based solely on the socio-economic status (NOMARG).

(2) Barriers Presented by the Provider Role

Fathers articulated the many barriers that they feel the provider role presents in regards to fatherhood. Specifically, they discussed the effects of continuous social persecution (SOPER) and disengagement, child support orders resulting in the loss of time spent with their children (TLOSS), and strained relationships with their children. Subsequent themes which also emerged include withdrawn visitation (WVIS) by mothers due to the perceived hazards of the communities these men could afford to live in, and lack of support from government and social entities. Moreover, fathers also spoke of an enormous and unavoidable feeling of disenfranchisement due to these barriers (DISFR).

(3) Negotiating Investment(s)

This section is directly linked to responses related to how fathers negotiate their form of investment in the lives of their children and to what degree they would (or would not)
enact said investment. Subthemes included: (a) deciding how to invest, socially (SOVEST) or economically (ECVEST); and to what extent (b) fathers articulate the desired outcomes of their investment (DOUT); (c) fathers felt that the desire encompassed in social investment (SDESIRE) outweigh the obligation that economic investment (OECON) entails; (d) some of the responses of the fathers suggest the centrality of organizations, specifically those of a religious nature, in their investment decisions (RELORG/GENORG).

(4) The Toll of Disenfranchisement

Disengaging as a result of social pressure was a resonant theme that prevailed throughout most of the interviews. Fathers believed that barriers and social pressures created an environment which is toxic to attempts at being a father. Salient subthemes included: (a) responses related to social ridicule (SORID), and (b) a strong desire to reengage in the future once they have improved upon their life circumstance (REINGA).

**Redefining the Provider Role**

Like many Americans, all of the respondents professed a belief in the importance of the ability to economically provide for their children. However, the men also underscored the centrality of social ties, time spent, emotional investment, and so forth as things that are just as, if not more, important than economic provisions for their children. With the many socio-historical shifts in the past half-century fatherhood has become more of an internal desire as opposed to an external necessity. “Paths to parenthood no longer appear natural, obligatory, or uniform, but are necessarily reflexive, uncertain, self-fashioning, plural, and politically
“embattled” (Stacey, 1996). Thus, with the transformation of children from an economic asset to a social and cultural desire, “an emotional rather than economic calculus governs the pursuit of parenthood” (Stacey, 1996). Men of lower socio-economic status who become fathers, intentionally or not, seemingly place greater importance on non-economic means of providing for their children in this era of postmodern parenting. Many of the men I spoke with were well aware of the economic responsibility, and in some cases liability, that children provide. Yet, they were also aware of how their own aspiration to be fathers was more so based on their desire to provide their children with love and attention, and to help them be well rounded and successful adults.

Rank-order questions were employed to help uncover men’s views on these topics. The intent was to discover whether the men maintained their ideals expressed via the interview on the provider role in the context of rank-ordering. The scale-format questioning involved ranking on a scale of 1 (extremely important) to 5 (not important) the following attributes concerning fathering: economic provisions, time spent, emotional investment, social investment, social ties, culture transmission, and protection. Each factor was ranked independently, any or all of them being ranked as very important or non-important. The men were also asked if they feel that there is something missing from the list that should be included. Only a few individuals added anything to the list; remarks that were made included things like teaching them (children) how to be a man/woman, and factors associated with social and emotional investment. In most cases, the rank-order questions yielded a clear pattern that mirrored what the men had stated over the course of our discussions. Most men said things that are consistent with the numeric rankings they gave, or offered clarity on their straightforward rankings of the factors.
The majority of the fathers spontaneously told me about their own father, either as an introduction to their experiences as fathers or as a way to explain their thoughts or behaviors regarding parenting and providing. For the fathers I interviewed, there was a very clear link between the way they were fathered, and provided for, and the way they chose to father, and provide for, their own children. Many of the fathers explained their understanding of the provider role by recounting how their own father had largely provided for them in a non-monetary form during their own childhood. One father said, “My dad wasn’t a man with a lot of money. And I knew what it’s like not having money to do this and that, but he was always there for me in every other sense. You know; to talk about bad days, girls, school, life…you name it. That’s what he provided and I never want any child to be without that.” During an emotionally intense interview, one father lamented, “…Everyone called him a deadbeat because he barely paid child support, but I saw him whenever I wanted, and he always called to check up on me. People made it seem like he couldn’t be my dad unless he was giving me money.” Another father commented that, “My pops paid support and stuff, but I don’t know him ‘cause that’s all he did. So one of the rules I had before I had my kids was to be the best father I could by providing them with love and attention, not just money.” One father explained that his life would have been better with a little more, “Face time. That’s something I didn’t have when I was a little kid. Shit… life probably would have at least been a little smoother if he just popped up once in a while to say hi and not just to drop off a check.”
Most fathers reported providing their children with love, affection, and being involved as one of their primary responsibilities. Stating that was right up there, if not more important, than monetary support. One father [Carlton\(^1\)] stated;

“Yeah, even though me and my wife been divorced almost ten years now, I have always been there. Every weekend I’m there. Every school function I’m there. Every sports game they play in I’m there. I’m there; sitting in the stands; they know I’m there and that’s what’s important to me, and them…and even their mother. I’ve made it known that no matter what’s going on between me and their mom; I’m going to be here for them.”

This was more than solely offering economic provisions; it was a matter of making sure that the children knew they are loved and that their needs are met. As another father explained, “I’m always there for them. I make sure that if they needed anything above and beyond what I was doing (monetarily), that issue would be taken care of.” Another father said, “I’m pretty much there for my son and I’ve helped to raise him the best way I can, and it’s not always by the amount of money I can pay.”

Several fathers reported never having any issues economically providing for their children, even still they all gave more worth to providing for their children in others ways, which they believed resulted in more of a difference in the lives of their children. For example, Greg, now remarried with stepchildren, explained how he believed that the emotional support he provides for his children is central to his role as a provider. He spoke in terms of it being irreplaceable, whereas monetary support isn’t. Greg stated:

“Well I can say this; my experience as father has taught me a whole bunch of different things about fathering. I give my children all the time and attention they need. Even though people tell me to just give the money and focus on my new family. But I give them what they need, attention and support...that’s how you provide for your children, by

\(^1\) All personal and local identifiers have been changed.
being there. If I don’t pay child support there is welfare and other stuff that will make sure they get money to eat and stuff. But it can’t give them love…ya know…that personal attention wouldn’t be given to them.”

The sentiments which Greg expressed were echoed by Solomon, a residential father of two, but in greater detail.

“I live with my kids, I wake up in the morning and they are there. I go to sleep at night and they are there. Day in and day out I’m dad! I provide for them economically on a daily basis, but anyone could do that if I’m not able to. The government will take care of that, feed them, cloth them, all that. You have telethons and commercials on TV that raise money all the time for kids, and programs that give money to poor people and children. So you can’t tell me that money should be number one concern as a father.”

Jason, an unmarried residential father, stated:

“My girl works, and I work…we both have jobs so providing financially for our daughter is both of our responsibilities, so it definitely is not my main responsibility. When we found out that we were going to be parents we talked about how no matter what happened between us…and I stress no matter what…that we would both be there for her, to show and tell her that we love her. We didn’t even talk about money. My main thing is for her to know that she is loved unconditionally and money doesn’t show her that.”

Jason’s statement underscores the fact that in today’s society, with men and women both possessing the ability to pursue and attain employment and educational opportunities, economic provisions for children can, and should, be the responsibilities of both parents. This has resulted in it becoming less of a primary concern for men since the responsibility no longer falls solely on their shoulders. Jason’s comment may only be applicable to the experience of two parent families where both parents are bringing home an income. Nevertheless, his statement further highlights the notion that, unlike previous generations of fathers, this generation of fathers sees the provider role being based in non-monetary forms of investment.

Some respondents were openly critically about the stereotypical perception of disadvantaged fathers. The myth that these disadvantaged men enter into fatherhood by accident
is something that a number of respondents brought to my attention on their own. These men spoke of feeling socially deprived by the fact that the dominant social group, largely consisting of individuals who exist within a higher socio-economic status, make it difficult to obtain social and cultural parity for subdominant groups such as themselves. In their eyes a disequilibrium was permanently established between the values of the disadvantaged and those that are not disadvantaged in regards to parenting, and in this case, fathering and fatherhood in general.

Eric, a non-residential father in a relationship with the mother of his child interprets the feeling of being stereotyped and marginalized as a disadvantaged man who is also a father. He expresses this feeling in terms of considering himself to be a father but not being looked upon as one by the majority of society. He draws attention to the fact that people believe him to have had no desire to be a father because of his economic status, thus making his entry into fatherhood seem to be unplanned and unwanted, when in fact it was just the opposite.

“Oh, we have been together for eight years now, yea we are not married or living together, but that’s what we want. But people [that I barely know or don’t know] assume that we didn’t mean to get pregnant…that we were being careless and that it happened on accident. When I ask why they say because I’m barely getting by now with my monies so how could I want another bill to pay? But I don’t think of it like that…don’t get me wrong I make sure that my son is clothed and fed, but that is not my first responsibility. I gotta make sure that my lil’ dude knows that his daddy loves him. When I’m not at work I’m there with him, and I call him every night when I’m not over there. I just wish folks would stop telling me that without money I can’t be a father or at the least a very good one…that’s some bullshit. I know plenty of men that have plenty of money and children, but that doesn’t make them a good father. It might make providing for their children easier for them, but not being a father. But if you get enough of these poor fathers out here to believe that they can’t be good fathers…and um…are worthless to their children unless they are throwing money at them then they just quit tryna be involved at all. Damn shame that folk don’t realize they be talking these good men outta bein’ fathers…”

These are Eric’s recollections of what he encounters from others regarding his being a disadvantaged man who is also a father. There are a few important issues that Eric raises in his
statement on being marginalized from fatherhood. The first point deals with the very real problem of being overlooked when it comes to being perceived as possessing the capability of being a good father without viable economic resources. Eric knows that money is necessary, but not required, to be in the environment of fatherhood. But, this is certainly not enough by itself. Research on paternal involvement has shown that father involvement directly affects child outcomes (Amato, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002). The second issue that is derived from Eric’s comments deal with the social psychological impact of being marginalized, which is being part of the fathering environment but gaining full acceptance from others existing within the environment. Some men also spoke of some instances where they felt pressured out of it. He says that society will never fully accept disadvantaged men as fathers. This statement is only reinforced by data on attitudes towards the provider role, non-residential fathers, and fatherhood in general. After discussing the issue of provider role conceptualization, I moved on to ask the men about their perception of external obstacles and barriers beyond these possible variations.

**Fathering with a Disadvantage: Voices Yet Unheard**

What is it like being a disadvantaged father in the United States today? Most of these men shared a reality that was bittersweet and filled with barriers. The veil is very thick and the voices of these men are rarely heard. The rhetoric of society suggests that these men have no desire to be fathers, and mostly become such by accident. However, from the recollection of their own incidents living in today’s society, this sample of disadvantaged men presents a different analysis. The bitter reality is that these disadvantaged men perceive their continued rebuttal from being socially accepted and credited as “true” fathers as instruction to disengage
from fatherhood completely. For example, Devin, a married father of one, acknowledges that limitations are set upon him as a father based solely on his financial status and the perception that he does not fit the role of provider as a direct result of this.

“For me I would have to say that…maybe…well it’s hard. I find it very frustrating to be a poor father in America today because not only am I aware of the challenges that I’ll face, but I have people constantly reminding me and the added challenge of society telling me I can’t do it because of my lack of income. I am aware of these challenges, but also aware that nothing comes without challenge. It doesn’t seem to be a matter of me being a protective father, or a more loving father, or a more involved father. I think the biggest barriers are having to prove that I can do all of these things without large amounts of money and people telling me that I’m less of a man and father because I poor…I’ve had people tell me that my child would be better off without me in his life because if I’m not around at least his mom could get welfare…you know how that makes me feel like crap after hearing it over and over…and over again?”

Alex, a non-residential father of two, points out the idea that disadvantaged men with children either suffer continuous persecution at the hands of society or slowly, but surely, disengage from the lives of their children completely. He views the landscape of disadvantaged fatherhood as permanent, and unchanging.

“I don’t think it’s very different than it’s ever been, it’s just a living hell. I have a thirteen year old and a two year old, and I’m still running into the same prejudices and opinions that I did over a decade ago. You need money, you can’t be a good father unless you have some money…and on and on. You name it and I’ve heard it, and am still hearing it. I think to be a poor man with children in America means that you will always be on edge and on the defensive. I think that’s pretty accurate. It’s kind of how we’ve learned to be. Some of us suffer peacefully with it while others choose not to deal with it, and their children at all.”

Alex continues on to say:

“To be in this situation in today’s society is looked upon as a negative thing. As disadvantaged fathers we have had to develop ways to cope with the ridicule that we face. We have to deal not only with public opinion but the system itself is against us. I don’t get to see my eldest child, and not because I don’t want to or because his mother doesn’t want me to see her, but because I have to work so much just to pay child support for him that I don’t have any time to see him. His mother and I had an agreement when he was
younger than I would give what I could and it worked for both of us, but in order for her to get government assistance she had to file for child support...so I don’t pay, I go to jail...and in order to pay the dictated amount I have to work two...yes two jobs and I don’t get to see him. I pay more now a month than I ever think I would pay if I was married to her. It just doesn’t even out. And [my son] doesn’t understand why he can’t see me or spend time with me. When I explain to him that the hours I work don’t allow for me to come to open house, go to sporting events and stuff he doesn’t understand. So in the eyes of society I’m a good father because I provide economically, but in my eyes and my sons[eyes]...which matter the most...I’m not a good dad because I’m hardly there. This provider role crap is actually stopping me from being a good father to my son. He doesn’t realize that he’s poor, but he does realize that his dad is never around.”

The gradual breakdown of Alex’s relationship with his son left him with a nearly depleted sense of being and a weakened desire to force a relationship with his growing son. He told me that due to having to pay so much child support he only got to interact with his son occasionally, but this did not allow for him to have sufficient time to intensely bond with his son as he believed that he should. He has become an outsider to his son, and seems to have been pushed further and further from his support network.

This experience, or one of similar nature, was shared by many of the participants in this study. Disenfranchisement with fatherhood, due to the failure to establish an emotional and social relationship with one’s children as a result of having to fulfill the responsibilities of the provider role, has caused many of these men to abandon all but their economic investment, and in some cases that as well. Consider the following respondent who seemingly echoes the sentiments of Alex. Jack, a residential father of two, speaks to the existence of barriers presented by the provider role. His experience is beyond the popular rhetoric of the non-residential father in that he is married to, and living with, the mother of his children. He knows, and shares, the continuous struggle to balance the expectations of the provider role and being a father in general. He speaks of them as being treated as two separate things in the present day.
“To be in this situation is weird…it’s like living in another time period or country where we aren’t supposed to interact with our kids, just throw money at them. For my family and me, our economic situation is solid. I live with [my significant other] and we have been together for over ten years, and I pay the bills…rent, groceries, you name it…so there is no problem there. But it’s the fact that I have to work so much that I barely see my kids.”

He uses the economic conditions of his family to indicate the continuous battle that exists between being a good provider and a good father. His wife and he both work; but his wife only contributes to the income via part-time labor, leaving him to work two jobs to maintain their standard of living. This is the condition for most disadvantaged men with children. Their standard of living is very tedious and unstable forcing them to focus more on providing more than fathering.

“For me the pressures of the provider role are insane. There seems to be no way to incorporate being an involved father with being a “good” provider. I mean I manage to keep us afloat so that we are stable economically, but because of that I am on rickety ground in terms of fathering, and my children are deprived emotionally by my continuous absence due to my work schedule. They are deprived of a good father that is involved. I mean we interact, but not like father and children should. My wife of course understands, but my kids…they just…I mean…they just don’t understand no matter how we try to explain it. People tell me all the time that they will understand it when they get older, but that’s too late in my mind.”

Jason describes his situation of being poor and a father in a society that encourages provider based fathering as “a constant challenge, day to day, in keeping his mind focused, his spirits high, and himself motivated to remain in the life of his daughter. It’s hard to maintain a positive outlook, when you know opinions’ and situations, in many cases, are stacked against you…” Jason views his assessment of the provider role as a challenge to face the odds that are weighed against disadvantaged fathers. Another father, David, stresses the point that the provider role is a source of constant hindrance for disadvantaged men with children. These
hindrances are part of the barriers that fuel the conflict between disadvantaged fathers and the provider role.

“Well some days it’s a really day to day struggle to exist. Some days, it’s lonely being in this situation. The people you want to understand…your kids…don’t. I would call my fatherhood a lonely one. My kids don’t feel as if I’m being a good father because I’m always at work. Sometimes it’s as if all is ok, but there seem to be fewer days when it feels really ok. It still feels very much like a struggle to show proof that I’m, that we’re worthy to be fathers. It’s a struggle because…because I can’t seem to prove it to society and my children at the same time, so it’s a constant struggle.”

The belief held by many in society that disadvantaged men unintentionally, and regretfully enter into fatherhood has resulted in the creation of policies that penalize them indirectly, and sometimes directly, however unintentional it may be. For instance, Jacob sighs in his assessment of the child support laws in Ohio. The laws that are actually meant to benefit children in effect can, and do, lead to more of a detrimental effect. In his opinion these laws have actually distanced fathers from being in the lives of their children, and pushed them out completely in some cases. It is a direct result of the deep-rooted belief in the provider role being the primary and, in some opinions, only way to be deemed successful as a father in today’s society.

“I don’t see things getting any better. Now I don’t mean to be a pessimist, but these laws aren’t as helpful as people think they are or should be. Under Ohio law, if I’m more than thirty days late for a payment, the child support enforcement people are sent to investigate, and then I gotta go to court…which is more money to pay for a lawyer that I don’t have, which should be obvious since I didn’t pay my support. Now I, and most men, don’t just not pay our child support, in most cases it’s because we have other bills to pay…and I mean the necessary stuff like utilities, rent, food, you name it…the stuff we need, or because one time I got laid-off, you know how the economy is, and it took me a while to find another job but since I was more than thirty days late, the court ordered that support payments come out of my check, but without a job there is no check to take the money from. I go into default, back payments cause my normal payments to increase and I can’t afford to pay that on my type of salary. So then what do I do? I ask the child
support people, the case-worker, the judge in court and all they can tell me to do is make
sure I find a way to pay, there are no negotiations, nada.”

Some would argue that this is still a direct result of the choices that Jacob has made. And
he understands that side of the argument as well. However, some of the more indirect
consequences can be seen in a statement made by Kelvin, a non-resident father of one.

“I pay my child support, that is never an issue for me. In fact I have it taken directly from
my check so that there is no misunderstanding or mishandling. If anything goes wrong it
has nothing to do with me, either the government messed up or she did, but not me. But
my issue is that as a result of paying my child support I don’t get to see my son, and not
because of work, even though it is a strain to work enough hours to pay the bills, but
because his mother doesn’t want him to come stay in the area that I live. Now I’ll admit
it’s not the best area, but it’s all I can afford. Check this out, I make about $18,000 a year
right…she makes about $20,000 and we both only have our son. So I pay about $540 to
$550 a month for child support…so what is that about …um, $6,500 a year in child
support leaving me with just over $10,000 a year to live off of. And that’s before taxes.
So where am I supposed to live on that type of income? I tell you one thing, it ain’t gonna
be in the best of neighborhoods. And I have to have at least two bedrooms, one for me
and one for him, which cost even more.”

He goes on to state how this has created stress between he and the courts, he and his sons
mother, and most of all between he and his son.

“…so she won’t allow my son to come stay with me. I mean I have a two bedroom
apartment, it’s not huge but I got two rooms. Still she doesn’t think that it’s a safe
neighborhood. Now I’ve been here for 3 years now and never had anyone mess with me
or my place, again it’s not the prettiest place to live but I call it home. But she still won’t
let him stay the weekend like he is supposed to or even come over. So when we go to
court I tell this to the judge and he tells me that the court has to do what is in the best
interest of the child and in my case it’s not letting him stay with me at my place even
though its court ordered. So I can’t have my time with my son, because of where I live,
and I live where here because of the amount off child support I have to pay. My son is 11
and doesn’t understand why he can’t come stay time with his daddy, and when I try and
explain to him why he doesn’t understand why daddy can’t just move. I just can’t win!
And I can’t afford a car so I would have to take the bus but that’s on the other side of
town so by the time I get there it would be time for me to leave or him to go to bed unless
she lets me stay the weekend or the night, and she’s not even willing to do that…”
Kelvin’s account shows how the system, which is setup in a way that supports the provider role, can cause chaos in the lives of these disadvantaged fathers. Tyrone described an experience that was similar to that of Kelvin.

“She won’t even let my kids come stay the night with me even though I have visitation rights…damn shame. As you can see I don’t live in the most impressive neighborhood but this is what I can afford. This is not where I want to be, and I’m trying to move to a better place but it costs money and it’s kind of her fault that I have to stay here. Like I told you earlier, I got my high school degree but I wanted to go to college so I did, nothing fancy, it was a community college but that took time which I don’t have anymore. I’m one semester away from getting my associates degree and I had to drop out because I had to pick up a second job to pay child support after it was increased because she quit a job she didn’t like to get a new job that she likes but it pays less. So I get messed over twice by the system. I can’t see my kids because she won’t let them stay in my neighborhood, but I can’t move because this is all I can afford. I was trying to do better by going to college but I have to drop out to pick up another job to pay support…someone does not want me to win.”

For a select portion of these men the demands of provider role have created numerous barriers to being an attentive, involved, and engaged father. While the existence of these barriers and how they manifest themselves are not necessarily the same for each of the respondents, there exists a common point of reference in the men’s discussions that they do exist and must be taken into account in the discussion of disadvantaged fathers and the procedures and policies that affect them. Regardless of the manifestation of the barrier, the interactions which these men have with them result in situations of conflict, strife, and insecurity, all of which can be set within the larger context of disenfranchisement with the provider role.

**The Toll of Disenfranchisement**

Many of the men became very emotional when speaking of the strain the provider role has caused them. Unforeseen barriers like those discussed above have led to reduced
involvement with their children for many of these men, and has also taken an emotional toll on them. This has resulted in some of these men slowly disengaging from the lives of their children. For many of these men disengagement is not their desire and their transitions to such are not sudden or critical shifts in their consciousness, but occur rather gradually and subtly as a result of their disenfranchisement. The following excerpts illustrate this theme:

“Yeah, I just kind of stopped coming around. Now don’t get me wrong I was very involved in the beginning but then our time together became less and less because I had to work so much in order to pay my support that I never got to see my kids. This was over like a five year span of breaking promises to spend time together and constantly having to hear the disappointment in their voices and running out of ways to explain why. Their disappointment became resentment, which turned into anger and them not even wanting to have anything to do with me. So I figured it best to just be there economically since that was one thing I was able to do [Eric, non-resident father].”

“I’m mad at how my relationship is with my kid. We live in the same house but I hardly ever see her because I work multiple jobs just to provide for her. She gets so upset that I can’t come to her activities so I just stop trying, I go to work and come home and sleep because I’m so tired. I’ve completely disengaged from her…and I know it’s not a good thing but that’s how it has to be so I can keep her clothed, fed, and sheltered [Jared, resident father].”

“I love my kids. When I was with their mother I used to talk with them, spend time with them and everything, but after we broke up I didn’t get to do those things. I pay my child support, but I don’t get to spend time with them anymore so the only way I figure to be a part of their life is to pay child support and nothing more. I call on birthdays and holidays but nothing more [William, non-resident father].”

“It was too much trying to be a provider, be involved, and all this while dealing with her [mothers] crap. I didn’t want my daughter to see me acting crazy all the time so I just stopped coming around [John, non-resident father].”

“So I can’t always afford to pay my child support, but I’m there when my kids need me…I’m involved. But folk keep telling me that if I don’t provide financially I ain’t a real father. After hearing that all the time I decided to only focus on my financial duty since that’s what everyone says is so import. I don’t deal with them on any other level [Edward, non-resident father].”
A handful of the men discussed how society at large, and in some cases individual people, had continuously reiterate that they are doing more harm than good by being in the lives of their children in their current situation. Instead of receiving reassurance that the bigger picture is their being present in any positive capacity, these men were told that their lack of economic resources of what to provide is a bad thing. Some of the men described how they felt trapped by the difficult feeling of thinking that they were doing enough and what they should, yet it didn’t come across as such. Lincoln describes how he felt trapped in a really difficult situation. He expressed how he felt that regardless of his choice, he would come out looking bad, but he was doing what he thought best at that time. He explained;

“It was not an easy decision to make…I hate when people think that. Like I just woke up one day and said fuck it I don’t want to be in their life anymore. Nah that’s not how it happened. I was beat down for years on what I was not doing right and how I was hurting them more then helping. Never once what I was doing right, or even any acknowledgment that I was trying. Believe me, the good I did by far outweighed the bad when I look back on it but with so many people that were in a better situation then me in life telling me the opposite…it just wore me down. I never expected fatherhood to be easy, but I never expected to feel as if the world was against me.”

These men also spoke to the fact that, unlike popular belief, even though their feelings of disenfranchisement resulted from criticisms and animosity that left permanent scars, their disengagement is not meant to be permanent. In many cases they spoke of how they looked forward to reengaging their children after they are better equipped to fulfill the requirements of the provider role or, in some cases, able to get their children to understand the facts of the situation. Some men spoke in terms of a few years to get things in order while others spoke of their desire to fully reengage their children once they entered young adulthood. These men also spoke as though they were very oriented toward a future with their children, when their situation
would be better and hopefully that would lead to a better relationship with their children. Their optimism about the future was also realistic in the fact that they believed it would not be easy for them to rebuild a relationship with their children, but it is something that they are more than willing to work on. One respondent explained that he believed his child would be more willing to forgive than society. He said, “I would bet on the odds of [my son] being more forgiving towards me after explaining to him that I did it not for me, but for him so that I was in a better situation to be in his life.” Another respondent goes on to say that “I would show my children that this time away was an investment in our relationship as father and child, hopefully they would not only understand that but be able to see it in my actions from that point on.” When asked how he foresaw this playing out, Darryl explained:

“Kids are going to have their own recollection of how things happened. I am very mindful of how my kids see me, and I always want to them to look up to me. I didn’t just stop coming around, I hope no parent would do that. I took the time to explain to them that daddy would not be around as much for while and explained why. So now I know that they shouldn’t feel abandoned. So when I make an attempt to be a part of their lives again that they will be mindful that I had to make a decision, in the midst of a not so good situation, that would lead to a better situation for us…not that I turned my back on them but that I invested in our future.”

Throughout the course of the interviews, it became apparent that the men perceived a very hopeful future between them and their children. They believed that this time away is not a bad thing, rather a sound investment in the future longevity of their relationship with their children. It would be a time where they could reshape their focus and equip themselves with the tools that are deemed necessary to be successful at fatherhood and the provider role. Lionel attributed his time away directly to the success of his current relationship with his children, and his finally being able to situate himself within the realm of the provider role.
“…so after, I think it was about 4 or 5 years, I had went back to school and got my GED. Found two part-time jobs, one became full-time with benefits and everything. By this time they were in high school and when I made attempts to come back around they were hesitant at first, but soon they began to warm up and now things are better than ever. They took a look at my situation and saw what I did to improve it and they couldn’t be more proud. My jobs allowed me to pay my support and now I’m in a situation where I have this great job with benefits, so not only am I paying support but they are insured under me and everything…”

It seems evident that disengagement is not the initial desire of these men, and not as easy or unplanned for them as some would suggests. These men found disengaging to be a choice leading down a path of ridicule and animosity, but ultimately saw it as a way of strengthening not only their relationship with their children, but their stance with society as good fathers. These men also felt that the time away provided them with opportunities to strengthen their stance in the role of provider. This seemed especially true for men who worked multiple jobs to pay their support and further their careers. In addition, a few of the men attributed their new outlooks, self-awareness, and determination to their time of absence. Thus, the toll of disenfranchisement is not always negative, and can help to strengthen the resolve of disadvantaged fathers.

**Investing: Types and Degree**

As discussed earlier, the majority of participants expressed a desire not only to be there economically for their children but socially and emotionally as well. These men also shared a strong desire to invest socially, culturally, and emotionally in the lives of their children, even if they could not always do the same financially. This was a challenge for these men due to the complexities that emerged in regards to the provider role as a result of their disadvantage. When
asked which form of investment they perceived to be most beneficial to their children most
fathers, resident and non-resident, prioritized social investment over that of a financial nature.
Additionally they expressed dejection by the fact that their disadvantaged status had prevented
them from performing fathering roles that they deemed as important.

“…you gotta pay the bills, but I would give anything to be more present in their life. I
think that regardless of our financial status our children need and want to know that we
are there for them, not just handing out money…[Marshal, resident father].”

“My pops paid his child support, but I never saw him. That hurt more then not having
money. Regardless I’m going to be there for my kids because that’s what I think is
important [Brian, non-resident father].”

“Money is my last concern when it comes to my kids. Not because I’m independently
wealthy or something, cause I’m not. But because I know that if for whatever reason I
can’t support them financially the government can, but that time spent, little advice here
and there, them intangibles are what’s important [Roger, resident father].”

“Investing in our children is good in all aspects, but when they are young they don’t
know about the money, all they know about is the time…that’s what’s most important
[Michael, resident father].”

“There are tons of children born that will never know what it’s like to not be poor, but
like the saying goes love don’t cost a thing. You can invest time in them to show them
that regardless of the things they may not have, they are worth [Theo, resident father].”

“I work so much to provide that I can’t find time to be in their lives socially. And that’s
frustrating because I feel that’s just as, if not more, important [Brent, non-resident
father].”

Felton, a non-resident father of three, expressed his dismay with those that considered
economic support as “…the most important thing in terms of investing in, and parenting my
children.” Felton spoke of things that are mandatory for parents to do as being “…forced and
undeserving of such high value.” He went on to assert that meeting the requirements of any
situation only show a willingness to follow the rules, but speak to nothing of the true value you
give to a situation or, in this case, a person. In this regard, giving precedence to financial investment is directly tied to fulfilling a mandate. While, on the other hand, making a social investment is a thing of choice and pure desire:

“I’m investing in the lives of my children, but not with money. I’m making deposits into an account marked social and emotional well-being. Ya know! This is something that I want to do, I don’t have to, shit I should…but I don’t have to. But providing monies is something that parents are supposed to do. Its part of what I like to call the bare minimum. It doesn’t make you a mom, or a dad. It makes you a parent…and just that.”

When asked to clarify what he meant, Felton offered the following example:

“Okay, think about being in school when you were younger. You have to go to school until you reach a certain age right…so you’re fulfilling the obligations. But your investment in trying to be an A-student versus just doing enough to pass makes all the difference of the type of student you are. Shit, kids don’t even have to pass now-a-day they just have to be in school. So showing up doesn’t make you anything more than a body in a class…same thing for making a money investment. You have to do those things because those are the rules, not because you want to. Make sense?”

Daniel, a single custodial father, expressed concerns that aligned with what Felton had stated during his interview. Daniel deemed social investment as a priority based upon the desire behind it.

“These days’ people expect us as men and fathers to be more socially invested in the lives of our kids, and of course I believe that too. But there are no laws, lawyers, courts, judges, enforcement agencies, none of that to force us to be socially invested. I mean can you imagine hearing that they created a child social support enforcement agency?! That would be hilarious! People would actually be in an uproar…how dare you tell me how much time I have to spend with my children [abrupt laughter]…but telling me how much to pay for them is just fine. I choose investing in them socially first because not only does it show my own, true desire to be a father, but its beneficial to my children. It allows me to show my children, and whomever else is paying attention, that the bare minimum is not enough for them. And child support, or economic investment is just that...minimum. My actions show them that daddy wants to, and I repeat…wants to do this. Not that he has to. And hopefully that thought will be an investment in itself…the minimum is just that, minimum and if they want to be successful in life…school, work, relationships, you name it…that the minimum should never be enough!”

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For many of the men the concern is that their children are not being properly invested in socially. This aspect of fathering is of great importance to these men. They believe that this would be essential to the lifetime success of their children. Ron explained, “Poor children are able to be successful in life because they are confident in the love and support that they have from those close to them…” Ron goes on to say, “Investing in a child’s self-worth and confidence can get them much further than any amount of money. Instilling in them that grit and determination to be successful is very important.” He went on to say “…how many times do you hear of people coming from nothing or humble beginnings and making it? All the time, and they always attribute the love and investment from one or both of their parents, or whomever raised them, as being key to their success.” Some of the men expressed how whenever they got to spend time with their children their focus was to build on that social investment.

“When I get to spend time with my lil’ man for the weekend I make sure that we spend time talking about him and his day, the good and bad, what he’s going through. We usually do this over a meal that we cook together. So not only am I showing him attention so that he knows he has my love and support but I’m also teaching him how to cook. Money can’t do any of that [Chris, non-resident father].”

“I have a son and a daughter that live with my ex-wife and I see that my daughter gets all the attention. I ain’t mad at it I’m just saying that she gets all of the nurturing and caring attention, but my son doesn’t really get that from his mother. I feel that he needs that and since he’s not really getting from her I give it to him…well both of them, but I make sure he gets it. You know how boys are…so I feel it is important to nurture and spend time with both, but him especially. I don’t want him to grow up mad at the world because no one showed him how to be a man and in control of himself [Roy, non-resident father].”

“I have it worked out with my job that when it comes to her school stuff, parent conferences, open houses, and stuff like that, that I can be there. Part of investing in her is showing her things that are important to her success and education is one of those things. I make sure we talk about school, and not just homework but if she is being bullied or bothered and stuff. There is so much
stuff going on in schools. I want her to know that she has my support [Martin, non-resident father].”

Deciding to prioritize a social investment in the lives of their children, as opposed to a financial one, is not any easy thing for these men to accomplish. It is a decision that is characterized by many others in a negative light. As one father puts it, “It comes across to some individuals as if I’m denying my paternity, and others have even challenged my sexuality for desiring to be more invested in his social well-being.” This father has experienced what many fathers in a similar situation experience on a daily basis. He is ridiculed and considered inadequate.

“I believe spending time, and being involved is much more important than money. I’d think that even if I was rich [Stace, resident father].”

“That’s why I make sure I come to these types of activities, because there are other fathers like me here. And I am learning here how to be a better father with the tools that I have, not stressing out over the ones that I don’t. I’m learning here that my social investment is important too. Now I’ve always thought that, but it’s nice to come to a place where not only do they think the same, but they show me ways to do it that I never thought of [Adrian, resident father].

Most of these men value being tough, having street smarts, and being capable of defending oneself. And has one respondent said “money can’t buy those.” Spending time with their children, especially in the case of male children, was an investment in making sure that they passed along the tools which they felt were a great necessity as illustrated by the following statements.

“I want to give him the tools to be a man...how to defend himself, but also how to handle himself in other situations. Schools and teachers are there to teach him the tools he will need to make money. I’ll support him in all that, but I’m focusing on the stuff they won’t teach him [Jack, residential father].”
“...by spending time with my daughter I can show her the love and support that she should look for in a man. Don’t they say women marry men like their fathers? If she just goes after men that have money, but treat her like dirt because she doesn’t know any better that’s gonna be a huge problem. Shit I may have to hurt someone [Carlton, non-resident father].”

“If I don’t teach him about manhood, who will? I may not be able to pass down any wealth but he’s got my last name, which is something that will always be his so I’m going to teach him how to represent that name...honor it. That’s what’s most important, honoring his name and his word as a man [Mike, resident father].”

The social institutions which these men participate in also shape their views on form, and degree of investment. Some of the most prominent institutions that shape these men’s views on investments are religious institutions (churches, etc.) and leisure patterns (hanging out with friends, and family while participating in various activities). Religious participation is fairly high by low-income individuals and these institutions are one of the few where disadvantaged men are encouraged to focus on their participation in the social realm of their children’s lives. For example, fathers who regularly attend a religious service come to understand familism and develop a willingness to prioritize social involvement, as opposed to economic. Familism is the idea that the family is a paramount source of emotional meaning and moral order in society, and individuals should treat family roles and responsibilities with high priority and the utmost respect. Thus, religious institutions tend to lend moral legitimacy to the ideology of familism (Wilcox, 2004).

A portion of the fathers spoke to the support that they received from their religious institutions and how it not only helped them cope with the mounting stress of their situations, but also how it encouraged them to focus on their abilities, instead of their abilities, in terms of fatherhood. And by doing so they are able to look at the big picture of fatherhood. Additionally;
they spoke to how religious institutions also offered a family centered culture where not only fatherhood, but masculinity, is closely linked to familial involvement. These religious organizations have created a unique space for disadvantaged fathers; one where they have the opportunity, and are encouraged, to invest time in their children. Furthermore, they are able to acquire good social standing by tending to their children. The following statements offer support to this train of thought.

“I’ve been going to church now, well back to church, pretty much since my first son was born. It helps me deal with stress that comes with being in my position. But the church has shown me how to handle that stress and given me ways to invest in my children. I get to go to bible study with them, I go to church with them on Sundays. That’s how I invest in my kids. I’m giving them time, and spirituality [Neil, resident father].”

“My religion has taught me that money is not a fix all, but nurturing is. I share my religion with my children which allows me to spend time with them and invest in their futures. That’s what’s important [Andre, resident father].”

“My church has a camp every summer and I’m a huge part of it. My kids get to come and I get to see them more than I ever did. The scripture says invest your children and that’s what I’m doing. The fathers in my congregation are encouraged to form strong social bonds with their children. Other then the camp we have breakfasts, picnics, outings, you name it…and all in promoting father-child bonding [Mac, non-resident father].

“Children are god’s gifts, and we gotta show them love. Not every man in the world is rich or well off, but every man has the ability to show love and that is what is most important for us to do for our children, show them love [Brad, resident father].”

These men spoke of their experiences in ways that imply that these religious organizations provided them with an environment for convenient social interaction with their children. These organizations cultivated actual father-child interaction by sponsoring collective participation in recreational, and community, activities. Their comments suggested their participation in these religious organizations enabled them to enact their vision of fatherhood, a
vision that includes prioritizing social investment. They hope that such prioritization would allow them to create a sense of meaning and purpose in their relationships with their children.

It became evident, throughout the course of the study, that all of the participants, regardless of their situation, prioritized making a social investment in the lives of their children. The men in this study found a way to enhance the lives of their children without much money. Many of the men have sought the services of fatherhood groups and programs (i.e. the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, Urban League, churches, etc.) for knowledge on how to be more involved and socially invested in the lives of their children. Others have turned to people in their own lives (i.e., family and friends) to help better their chances of success. Some men have even humbled themselves to deal with the animosity and disrespect of their child’s mother so they can spend time with their children. As Gino stated: “I had to put my pride and argumentative spirit aside so that [my son] knew I was trying to be there. It helped me to prove everything that people had said to him about me wrong.” Their desire for strong, meaningful relationships with their children have made it clear that all of the men in this study have demonstrated their strong desire to utilize the resources they posses to make up for the main one that they lack, money.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this qualitative study it has been my aim to go beyond exploring the influence of the provider role on disadvantaged men’s decisions about fatherhood and paternal engagement. The intent of this study was to extend the current research on fatherhood by investigating an overlooked arena of fatherhood research: the experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of disadvantaged fathers related to the provider role and its expectations. While money makes fulfilling expectations of the provider role more likely among fathers, the question is whether the provider role itself makes fathering less likely for disadvantaged men.

To this end, the qualitative methodology used included in-depth individual interviews, and biographical questionnaires. This study was conducted from July 2006 to July 2009. Research and interviews included over 200 hours of direct interaction with research subjects in a variety of locations (coffee shops, homes, libraries, etc.). The purposeful sample consisted of 46 in-depth semi-structured interviews, of varying lengths, with self-identifying disadvantaged fathers in venues that included the fathers’ homes, coffee shops, public parks, and sponsored fatherhood activities throughout the state of Ohio.
Summary and Discussion

The following major themes emerged from participants’ responses: (a) the desire to redefine the provider role; (b) the existence of barriers presented by the provider role (and the subsequent navigation of said barriers); (c) negotiations and determinates of type of child investment; (d) the toll of disenfranchisement on fatherhood intents, practices, and outcomes. The subsequent section discusses how each of the research questions set forth in this study were answered in connection to these overarching themes.

Research Question 1: How do disadvantaged fathers conceptualize the provider role?

Findings from the in-depth interviews indicated that these men desired to become fathers based on their perceived ability to provide their children with non-monetary forms of support. This is how disadvantaged men conceptualized the provider role. The most recurrent responses related to providing emotional and social support to their children. Fathers mentioned both being involved and being engaged. Moreover, participants spoke frequently of the need to be more than an economic provider; to them it was a matter of making sure that their children knew that they were loved and cared for. The men desired to make a difference in the lives of their children, and to provide them with something that they believed only they could.

Fathers also spoke of viewing the provider role as “unisex”—something that is suitable for either sex, with men and women both possessing the ability to pursue and attain the tools necessary to be successful at the provider role. Throughout the course of the in-depth interviews, several individuals mentioned their dismay with the stereotypical perception of disadvantaged fathers. Specifically, the concern was with the perception that their entry into fatherhood was
unplanned and undesired. For example, Josh, one of the respondents, stated “everyone assumed that since I wasn’t married to my baby’s mother that we hadn’t planned the birth of our son.”

Respondents continually referenced the social and psychological impacts of being marginalized as fathers. They spoke of existing within the realm of fatherhood, but not being afforded the same respect, consideration, and appreciation as non-disadvantaged fathers. Several fathers stated that they found their dealings within this arena to be “unaccommodating,” “hostile,” and riddled with barriers as opposed to a place where they; “felt welcomed,” “felt connected,” and could “get support.” It was evident that, as a result of their inability to economically provide for their children, disadvantaged men did not feel the companionship and support that they expected.

The priority for many of the fathers in this study was redefining the provider role to include more than merely economic provisions. Statements indicating the necessity to distance the provider role from the core of fatherhood, equate spending time as providing, and increasing the importance of cultural and emotional investment were plentiful. However, fathers could not identify any particular happenings, either socially or lawfully, that would assist this desired shift in the conceptualization of the provider role.

Additionally, some father also stressed the need to make adjustments to the child support system. One father brought to light that even though the child support system, and its subsequent enforcement agencies, is crafted with the best of circumstances in mind, it does penalize specific demographics. In his case, non-married cohabitating individuals with children. While there appears to be great need and desire for a redefining of the provider role, there is clearly a paucity of belief that such will be done.
Research Question 2: What perceived barriers does the provider role present to disadvantaged fathers? And what effect does this have on their involvement in the lives of their children?

The researcher was able to identify the following emerging themes related to perceived barriers constructed by the provider role: (a) The social persecution and rebuttal by society as not being “true” fathers leading to disengagement, (b) Prioritizing the provider role subsequently leading to the inability to socially and emotionally invest in children for both resident and non-resident fathers; (c) The provider role as being detrimental to visitation and social engagement with children. These findings are corroborated by previous research in which Doherty et al. (1998), Amato (1998), and Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1995) all spoke to the existence of distance, new marriage, money issues, legal issues, lack of social support, and lived experience as barriers to involvement.

The overarching theme to this question is that the provider role, in its current form, only serves to deepen the overall disadvantaged status amongst disadvantaged men. As previously mentioned some of the fathers perceived the provider role to be detrimental to their visitation with, and social engagement of, their children. Most men that spoke in terms of this barriers existence were non-resident fathers. They discussed how the provider role creates a legal need for child support, and how child support diminishes their already low wages forcing them to live in “less than great” residences, existing in communities and neighborhoods that are also “not up to par.” Some of these men have experienced disdain from the mothers of their children that have no desire to allow their children to visit these places, even if only for a few hours during the day. Fathers that have this experience find no recourse from the legal system when they complain. This is because most courts agreed that these neighborhoods may not be the safest for
the children to visit. Thus, these men are in effect pushed to the boundaries, and in some cases completely out of, the lives of their children as a result of provider role expectations.

Other fathers discussed how the economic pressures of the provider role, specifically child support orders, created a need to sometimes work multiple jobs to not only provide for their children, but themselves as well. The necessity of an increased workload led these men to decrease the time spent with their children, which in some cases created a strained and hostile relationship between them, their children, and the child’s mother. Those who shared this experience argue that this circumstance would, if not already, lead them to become absentee fathers, not as result of their own desire, but of their circumstances. All respondents agreed on one fact, what they viewed as most important: their day-to-day relationship with their children and being engaged in their lives, was harmed more than helped by the provider role. However, these data do suggest that disadvantaged fathers do understand children’s need for both economic provision and nurturing.

Research Question 3: Which form of investment, economic or social, do disadvantaged fathers consider most beneficial to provide for their children?

The answers regarding this question were particularly informative. They helped to establish that disadvantaged men do not disagree with the ideology of the provider role; instead they do not attribute the same values to it as others. To this end, fathers stated a strong desire to invest not solely economically, but socially and emotionally in the lives of their children. This outcome is supported by previous research which suggests that low-income and working class fathers have a strong desire to spend time with, and engage, their children (Hamer, 1998; Nelson et al., 2002). Fathers went on to share their beliefs that this is something, unlike money, that
cannot be substituted by entities other than themselves. To them social and emotional investment is seen as “a way to equip their children with the tools they will need to be successful in relationships, school, work, play, and life in general.” They also attributed a greater sense of self, more self confidence, the ability to make good choices, and having a better future directly to investing socially in the lives of their children.

There was ample discussion of how their own personal life histories are filled with a lack of social investment from their fathers which, in turn, led them down a “rough road,” placed them in “dire situations,” and led to a life of “regret.” A large portion of the men spoke to how their own fathers had paid child support, but lacked the social presence and engagement that they “so desired.” This left many of the men with a void that regardless of how they tried to fill it, still exists today and is leaving them with a sense of never feeling loved or appreciated. And the desire to fill this void is discussed as being detrimental to their desired success in the life, and not what they want for their own children.

Furthermore, fathers believe that a social investment is something that not only allows them to remain in good standing with their children, but also strengthens the fathers’ motivations and desires to fulfill the obligations of the provider role by investing in their children economically. The fathers attributed a social and emotional connectedness to their children with helping them to not only become better fathers, but as one respondent put it “better husbands, brothers, uncles, and friends.” Another father credited his social investment with helping to strengthen his relationship with his own father. For some, it appears that making a social investment has become a “roadmap” to happiness and success. Thus, for many of the
participants in this study, this provides meaningful experiences which positively influence their lives.

One of the vital contributions of this study is the emphasis it places on re-evaluating the centrality of the provider role in terms of fatherhood. The findings presented within this study imply that the expectations of the provider role create undesirable situations where more harm is done than good. Situations that only appear to maintain, if not intensify, the plight of fatherhood for disadvantaged fathers by causing them to completely disengage from the lives of their children. This ideology is not unknown to previous and current research on fatherhood literature; however, it has not been a major focus either (Roy, 2004; Edin et al., 2002; Catlett & McKenry 2001). Another contribution of this study is that the majority of research that focuses on provider role expectations, and economic resources, focuses solely on non-resident fathers where this study was conducted with an inclusive approach of non-resident, and resident, fathers.

Based on the findings of this study, disadvantaged men are caring parents who desire to be present and invested in the lives of their children. This confirms the notion of previous research on low-income fathers that draws similar conclusions. In addition, the barriers resulting from the provider role, as discussed by these men is similar to barriers discussed in existing literature. Additionally, the literature discusses how disadvantaged men are at a disadvantage due to poverty, and the fathers in this study do report this factor as being pivotal to their fatherhood and provider role experiences. Lastly, the fathers perceived lack of social support and acceptance is extremely prevalent throughout their narratives as indicated in existing literature would lead us to expect.
Limitations

This research effort has several limitations. First, the focus here is on fathers; information from mothers and children was not collected. The literature shows that fathers typically report higher father involvement levels and levels of economic support than mothers report for fathers (Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day, & Call, 2002; Seltzer, 1991). In addition, fathers may not be willing to discuss some barriers to involvement if it will make them appear irresponsible or uncommitted to their children (Bernard, 2002).

Secondly, this is a qualitative study therefore the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. The current study emphasizes experiences of disadvantaged men that reside in urban environments. Therefore, there are no attempts to generalize these findings to disadvantaged fathers in rural or Appalachian environments. Future studies should expand this analysis to disadvantaged fathers who reside in a rural or Appalachian context. Marsiglio (2007) points out how little we know about the physical and spatial contexts of fathering. It would be beneficial to fatherhood research to know how the aforementioned effects disadvantaged fathers experiences within the realm of fatherhood, as well as the effect, if any, on provider role conceptualization.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research is an attempt at allowing the voices of disadvantaged men to speak about issues from their own experiences. Respondents tell their stories from the experiences they have lived in this society. The resulting narratives offer insight into broader questions about the significance of the provider role for disadvantaged fathers and suggest a few immediate goals.
An in-depth analysis is critically needed in order to best understand, and assist, this “minority” group. This analysis should be based on the knowledge that the experience of disadvantaged fathers is different from the experience of non-disadvantaged fathers. These data demonstrate that marginalization as a result of not being able to fulfill expectations of the provider role continues to impact the lives of these men—even the resident, and married, fathers within this realm. Additionally, we must be committed to research that sheds a new perspective on these men. This would allow researchers to uncover the type of provider role identities that are created by in a context that privileges provider based fathering, primarily of an economic nature. The men in this study also indicated that their entry into fatherhood is not by accident but desire. Thus, future research is needed to investigate how disadvantaged men’s procreative consciousness forms despite the lack of financial resources blatantly deemed necessary to navigate fatherhood, and consequently the provider role.

Final Thoughts

The portrait outlined here of what disadvantaged men have to say about the provider role, and how they make sense of it, underscores the need to forge a new cultural framing of them. This new frame must acknowledge that these men are complex actors who function as they do because their social world has mandated that they do so, or left them with few options for alternative modes of functioning. In spite of the numerous obstacles in their path, participants remain optimistic about their future as fathers.

While the researcher set out to produce knowledge, he now understands he gained much more than he provided. Equally, he was inspired by the sentiments expressed by these men, how
expressive they are with their thoughts and desires, and the belief they have in their ability to be an asset in the lives of their children. Although they face continuous struggles they manage to demonstrate, by their own words and actions, that there is indeed hope.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Hollingshead, A.B. (1975). *The four-factor index of social status*. Unpublished manuscript, Yale University, New Haven, CT.


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APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: ______________________________

(Your name is requested solely for the purposes of matching survey data to later interviews. All responses will be kept confidential. After all survey data has been collected and interviews completed, all identifying information will be removed and a pseudonym will be assigned.)

1. What is your age? _____
   - 18-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 35-39
   - 40 and up

2. Which best describes your racial/ethnic background?
   - Asian or Pacific Islander
   - Hispanic, regardless of race
   - White, not of Hispanic origin
   - Black, not of Hispanic origin
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Other __________________________

3. Please describe your residential location:
   City: ______________________________________

4. Which best describes your current marital status?
   - Married
   - Domestic Partner
   - Divorced
   - Widowed
   - Never Married
5. Which best describes your current relationship status with the mother of your child(ren)?
   _____Married
   _____Domestic Partner
   _____Divorced
   _____Widowed
   _____Never Married

6. When describing your current work status, would you say that you are:
   _____Working full-time
   _____Working part-time
   _____Temporarily not working
   _____Unemployed
   _____Retired
   _____Other__________________

7. If you are currently working, what is your occupation? _______________________

8. Approximately how much money do you make per year? _______________________

9. If you are married, how would you describe your spouse’s work status?
   _____Working full-time
   _____Working part-time
   _____Temporarily not working
   _____Unemployed
   _____Retired
   _____Other__________________

10. If you are married/cohabitating and your spouse/partner is currently working, what is their occupation? _______________________

11. Approximately how much money does your spouse/partner make per year?
    _______________________

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12. Compared with American families in general then, would you say your family income is:

_____ Poor
_____ Working Class
_____ Middle Class
_____ Upper-Middle Class

13. How far in school did you go?

_____ Did not finish high school
_____ Graduated from high school or equivalent (GED)
_____ Graduating from high school and attended a vocational school, a junior college, a community college, or another type of two-year school
_____ After graduating from high school, went to college but did not complete a four-year degree
_____ Graduated from a four-year college
_____ Master’s degree or equivalent
_____ Ph.D., M.D., or other advanced professional degree

14. How many children do you have? ______

15. Do you currently reside with your child? ______

16. Please explain your living situation

________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Provider Role

1. Please tell me how you interpret the provider role? Do you have a positive overall opinion of the provider role and its expectations or a negative overall opinion?

2. Discuss which dealing(s) have made for a positive experience, and why?

3. Discuss which dealing(s) have made for a negative experience, and why?

4. What would you say that you’ve learned about the provider role from each of these experiences?

5. Because of the provider role, what are some of the obstacles that you must overcome?

6. What kind of father has the provider role led you to become?
   a. Would you say that it has helped, hurt, or had no effect?
   b. To the best of your knowledge, is there a situation that best describes the aforementioned effect? Examples: a job, trouble with wife and/or kids?
   c. Are you satisfied with how you “meet” provider role expectations?

Family Situation: Marriage and Children

Marriage and Relationships

Now I’d like to ask you a few questions about your current family situation.

7. Describe your current or most recent long-term or steady relationship.
8. Describe your relationship with the mother of your child/children:
   a. Was this person a spouse, partner, girlfriend?
   b. How long did/ has your relationship last/lasted?
   c. Do/ did you live together?

9. In general, how would you characterize the level of support that you currently give with regards to your child/children?

10. Describe the situations in which the mother of your child/children made it easier for you to achieve or maintain a relationship with your child/children?

11. Describe the situations in which the mother of your child/children made it more difficult for you to achieve or maintain a relationship with your child/children?

12. In general, would you say that your experiences with the mother of your child/children are determinants of the level of support that give to your child/children? Or time that you spend with them?

Children

Now I’d like to ask you a few questions about children.

13. How many children do you have?

14. How do you prefer to invest in your children; socially, emotionally, economically, etc.?

15. How has the provider role affected your interaction with your children?

Experiences and Impressions of Fatherhood

16. How would you rate your fatherhood experience from its beginnings until now? In other words, do you have a positive overall opinion of fatherhood or a negative overall opinion?
17. Discuss what made for a positive experience, and why?

18. Discuss what made for a negative experience, and why?

19. What would you say that you’ve learned about yourself since becoming a father?

20. What attributes did you bring to being a father and where did you acquire them?

21. What are your goals for your children, and how do you plan to help them achieve these goals?

**Philosophy of Fatherhood**

22. What is your idea of a good father?
   a. Does the provider role affect this? Explain.

23. Is it more important for a father to provide for his children socially or economically? Explain.

24. Are the following important in determining a good father? Explain.
   a. Presence and availability.
   b. Money
   c. Age

25. Which race/ethnicity has the best chance for being perceived as a good provider and why?
26. Do you know anyone personally, besides yourself, who you feel is a good father right now?
   a. What do they do?
   b. Why do you think that they are a good father?
   c. What is it about this person/these people that allow them to be good father(s)?

27. Do you believe that it is possible to be a good father without being a good provider? Explain.

28. Can a good provider be a bad father?
   a. Give examples of specific circumstances
   b. List qualities of those providers that make them bad fathers, such as poor relationships with their children, relationship with the child’s mother, many children, etc.

**Attitudes and Opinions**

29. What type of relationship do you believe that fathers with a similar socio-economic status, level of education, etc. as yourself have with their fathers? With their children?

   a. Do you believe that father-child relationships differs based on the fathers:
      Race?
      Age?
      Socioeconomic Status?
      Presence?

30. Where do you rank your children in terms of yours priorities?

   a. Do you believe that this is where they should fall? Why or why not?
31. What do you think about the following statements:
   a. “Fathers with the most physical presence in the lives of their children are the best fathers.”
   b. “Fathers with the most financial investment in their lives of their children are the best fathers.”

32. How do you believe society views you in terms of:
   a. The financial aspects of fatherhood?
   b. The social aspects of fatherhood?
   c. The emotional aspects of fatherhood?

33. How do you respond to society’s negative perception of disadvantaged fathers?

Conclusion

Do you have any questions or issues about the interview that you would like to raise with me?

Is there anything that you left out of our discussion that you would like to discuss now?
Interviewer Observations

The respondent’s general attitude was…

1 open, 2 candid 3 4 5 defensive, guarded

In his social behavior, the respondent was…

1 outgoing, 2 engaging 3 4 5 withdrawn, passive

In the interview, this person’s behavior was…

1 cooperative 2 3 4 5 uncooperative

I have the feeling that this person’s thoughts and feelings are…

1 very clearly 2 3 4 5 totally unclear and incomprehensible

I have the impression that this person’s ability to reason and comprehend is…

1 excellent 2 good 3 adequate 4 impaired 5 grossly impaired
Hello my name is Derrick M. Bryan and I am a doctoral student in the sociology department at The Ohio State University.

Thank you again for being willing to participate in this research study.

This research is for completion of my dissertation in The Ohio State University’s Department of Sociology. Its purpose is to gain a greater understanding of how disadvantaged men interpret, experience, and navigate the provider role; and any barriers it may present them with.

The confidentiality of your identity will remain unknown to everyone but this researcher. At any time you may end the interview. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used.

There is a minimal chance that slight psychological stress could possibly result from sensitive moments between the interviewee and their father, or their child, being relived. The likelihood of psychological stress occurring is minimal and to the extent of modest or no severity.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at The Ohio State University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

Thank you again for your time

--
Derrick M. Bryan
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Sociology
The Ohio State University
238 Townshend Hall
1885 Neil Avenue Mall
Columbus, OH 43210-1222
Office: 614.688.8529
## APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE

*Demographic Characteristics (n = 46 Fathers)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayton</td>
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<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
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<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
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<td>2%</td>
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<td>Less than High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completed HS or GED</td>
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<td>Some College</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Children</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place of Residence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>With partner &amp; child</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship with mother of child</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried Partner</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Partner</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>