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Fatherhood Intervention Development in Collaboration with African American Non-resident Fathers

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Abstract

Because interventions developed in partnership with African American fathers not residing with their children are virtually non-existent, existing interventions fail to address the multiple factors that constrain these fathers' positive involvement with their children. We developed a video tape fatherhood intervention: *Building Bridges to Fatherhood*. In collaboration with a Fathers Advisory Council composed of 12 African American fathers, we used Aranda's framework for community-based nursing intervention development to design the intervention. Data from 13 focus group meetings show Advisory Council members' insights on program structure and content, fathers' commitment to their children and communities, and the benefits they garnered from Council participation. The implications for involving fathers in intervention development include using relevant language, vernacular, and interpersonal interactions.

Keywords

fathering; design development; care of minority groups; parent-child relationships; focus groups

In the United States, 25% of all fathers live in residences apart from their biological children 18 years and under (Fields, 2003; Stewart, 2010). According to the 2011 Pew report on fatherhood in America (Livingston & Parker), when fathers and children live separately, 27% report no visits with their children, and 31% report less than once a month telephone calls/emails to their children. Non-resident fathers tend to be less involved than resident fathers with their children in ways that are mutually meaningful and beneficial, despite the increasing use of digital communication across varying socioeconomic levels (Hofferth, 2007). The numbers are even more disquieting for African Americans, with over 60% of African American children growing up in homes without their biological father in residence (versus 40% Latino and 24% Whites; (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). African American children and fathers are less likely than Latinos and Whites to have regular and meaningful contact with one another (Stewart, 2010).

Despite the fact that so many African American fathers live apart from their children, most value fatherhood and want to be involved in their children's lives (Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-Lemonda, 2008; Julion, Gross, McLaughlin, & Fogg, 2007). Two fathers in the Julion (2002) study of African American non-resident fathers stated: "Being a father is a privilege and an honor..." and "I want to be there to teach my child things my dad wasn't there to teach me." Despite the importance of fathering to fathers, the relationships between fathers and children living in separate households are fragile.

According to data from the Fragile Families and Wellbeing Study (FFCWS; Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001), a national study of unmarried families (Carlson &

McLanahan, 2010), the time of birth represents a “magic moment” for African American non-resident father involvement (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Mincy & Donahue, 2010, p. 16), with over 80% of fathers either present at birth or visiting while the mother and child are in the hospital (Carlson & McLanahan, 2004). Sustained father-child contact, however is variable and typically wanes over the preschool years, (Guzzo, 2009; Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, & Lamb, 2009). A significant number of fathers’ express discontent with the quality and quantity of their involvement with their children (Carlson, McLanahan, England, & Devaney, 2005; McLanahan et al., 2010; Mincy & Pouncy, 2007). Therefore, the purposes of this paper are to (a) describe the development, in collaboration with an advisory council of African American fathers, of an intervention aimed at increasing fathers’ involvement with their preschool aged children (2–5 years), improving mother father relationships, and improving both father and child outcomes, and (b) identify the extent of mutual gain experienced by fathers from having participated in intervention development. Contingent upon the endorsement of the fathers, we hypothesized that a group discussion format using “short video scenes to jumpstart the discussion,” would be an acceptable format for the intervention. This intervention format was successfully used with urban African American and Latino families in our prior research.

Background

Although lack of proximity to the child is one reason non-resident fathers are less involved with their children, there are also societal and contextual barriers that can supplant fathers’, especially African American fathers’, determination to stay connected with their children (Hofferth, 2007; Julion et al., 2007; Smeeding, Garfinkel, & Mincy, 2009). For example, discordant relationships with the mothers of their children are cited as the most significant barrier to affirmative father involvement (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009; Featherstone, 2010; Rienks, Wadsworth, Markman, Einhorn, & Moran Etter, 2011). This barrier is compounded when fathers have children in multiple households (Juby, Billette, Laplante, & Le Bourdais, 2007; Manning, Stewart, & Smock, 2003).

A dearth of personal and interpersonal resources also contributes to diminished father involvement. Limited financial and educational resources (Lemay, Cashman, Elfenbein, & Felice, 2010; Lerman, 2010), limited knowledge about their importance to their children (Fletcher & StGeorge, 2011), limited fathering skills (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007; Smith, 2005), and few resources or social supports (Coles, 2009; Palmer, 2011; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006) leave fathers feeling less prepared for fatherhood. Societal barriers such as incarceration separate them from their children and marginalize them in society (Cooke, 2005; Moses, 2010; Swisher & Waller, 2008). Exposure to racism and discrimination diminishes their physical and psychological wellbeing (Coles, 2009; Sellers, Bonham, Neighbors, & Amell, 2009; Willis & Porche, 2006). These barriers weaken fathers’ conviction that they are important contributors to their children’s well being. Because these barriers are often intergenerational, many young men have little experience with resident fathers who are involved in the lives of children in long-lasting and meaningful ways (Ball, 2010; Roy & Dyson, 2010; Vereen, 2007). Today’s generation of fathers has limited fathering examples and role models to emulate.

Barriers to father involvement are compounded by societal portrayals and the view of some single mothers that fathers are uninvolved, unimportant and unnecessary (Gee, McNerney, Reiter, & Leaman, 2007; Perry, 2009; Roy & Dyson, 2010), except for paying child support and offsetting federal subsidies to low-income women and children (Horn, 2003; Pearson et al., 2003). Despite these barriers and sentiments, most African American fathers highly value their relationships with their children and want to do well by them (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Coles, 2009; Julion et al., 2007).

Some work on fatherhood interventions primarily aimed at increasing the involvement of fathers with their children exists. Because these programs were developed from information obtained from mothers alone (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999), White divorced fathers (Lamb, 2000), small groups of adolescent fathers (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002; Mazza, 2002), resident fathers (Holmes, Galovan, Yoshida, & Hawkins, 2010; Magill-Evans, Harrison, Rempel, & Slater, 2006), or low-income African American fathers exclusively (Roy & Dyson, 2010), the relevance of this work for broader groups of fathers is called into question. Moreover, some fatherhood programs developed with low-income men as the intended participants were primarily focused on improving fathers' economic conditions so fathers could pay child support for their non-resident children (Horn, 2003; Pearson et al., 2003). Other programs targeting fathers have been focused on healthy marriages and couples' relationships (C. P. Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Pruett, 2007; P. A. Cowan, Cowan, Cohen, Pruett, & Pruett, 2008; P. A. Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). Although important, these programs do not address the unique needs of African American fathers who are unmarried, no longer romantically involved with their children's mothers, and non-resident. Because little is known about relevant and acceptable interventions for helping African American fathers remain engaged in the lives of their children, minimal progress has been made in altering sub-optimal father involvement (Buckelew, Pierrie, & Chabra, 2006; Hofferth, 2007; Jordan-Zachery, 2009).

Culturally and contextually relevant interventions have a greater likelihood of acceptance and attendance (Alvidrez, Snowden, & Kaiser, 2010; Branson & Davis, 2007). Several parenting interventions exist that have been guided by the cultural and contextual perspectives of low-income and minority families (e.g., *The Chicago Parent Program*, Gross, Garvey, Julion, & Fogg, 2007 and *the Incredible Years Series*, Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008). Both of these parenting programs were developed primarily with the input of mothers (Gross et al., 2003; Gross et al., 2009; Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Hammond, 2007), and focused upon modifying parental behaviors and reducing disruptive behaviors in children. Therefore, it is not a surprise that participation of fathers in parenting programs, even culturally relevant ones, has not kept pace with the participation of mothers, either because of fathers' perception that the program was not meant for them (Hallberg, Beckman, & Håkansson, 2010; Helfenbaum-Kun & Ortiz, 2007; Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008) or because these programs traditionally have been offered in matrifocal settings such as day care centers and schools (Lu et al., 2010; Mazza, 2002).

We know of only one fatherhood program that underwent rigorous testing in a randomized clinical trial that was developed for and with the guidance of African American fathers. The *Fathers and Sons Program* (Caldwell, Bell, Brooks, Ward, & Jennings, 2011; Caldwell, Rafferty, Reischl, De Loney, & Brooks, 2010; Caldwell et al., 2004;), was developed to support African American fathers' involvement in helping prevent risky behaviors in their preadolescent sons. This program was effective in both improving the ability of fathers to communicate with their sons and in reducing sons' risky sexual behaviors. Including fathers as stakeholders is critical in developing interventions aimed at involving African American fathers in a consistent, affirmative, fatherhood experience that endures throughout the child's growth and development through adulthood.

Framework for Intervention Development

In order to conduct community-based research effectively, a two-way exchange of information and mutual benefit is fundamental, particularly in the African American community, where the potential for mistrust runs high (Shalowitz et al., 2009; Woods, 2009). Prior well-known research atrocities (i.e. Tuskegee syphilis study; Huang & Coker, 2010), the perception that African Americans will not be treated equitably (Hammond,

2010; Willis & Porche, 2006), and the belief that researchers consistently take from the community and give little back in return fuel this mistrust (Ford et al., 2009; White-Cooper, Dawkins, Kamin & Anderson, 2009). Research conducted to discover the specific reasons that African American men participate in volunteer/community work reveals that African American men are motivated for the greater good of the community and for altruistic reasons (Hyman, 2006; Mattis et al., 2004; Mattis, Hearn, & Jagers, 2002). In recognition of the importance of this sense of communalism among African American men, and the value of mutual gain among intervention development stakeholders, we sought to explore fathers' perceptions of how they benefited from their participation in the process of designing the fatherhood intervention.

Aranda's (2008) framework for community-based nursing intervention development framed this intervention design study. Aranda's framework includes five planning stages: (a) defining the problem within the target population; (b) determining the conceptual framework for the proposed intervention, which in turn guides content; (c) determining delivery methods and dosage; (d) identifying the desired outcomes and outcome measures; and (e) planning for managing intervention fidelity. We focus here on initial intervention development stages a through c.

The conceptual framework that guided the intervention content in stage b is the Billingsley African American Family Model (BAAFAM; Billingsley, 1992), an ecological framework that builds upon the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and others (Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2012). In this model individuals are considered within the contexts of the family (including demographics, family patterns, and structure); community, history, and culture (e.g., racism and discrimination); and contemporary society (including political climate, public policy, and the criminal justice system). This model aligns with the phenomenon of non-resident fatherhood as it delineates the barriers to and contexts of affirmative father involvement and provides a strong conceptual and empirical basis for the components of the intervention and the hypothesized relationships between the intervention and improvements in father, child and family outcomes (Kovach, 2009).

Methods

We used a qualitative exploratory design with repeated focus groups (Morgan, Fellows, & Guevara, 2008). An advisory council of African American fathers who did not reside with their children participated as stakeholders in a series of 13 focus groups. The fathers in the advisory council reviewed, gave meaning to, refined, and extended the findings from previous meetings in order to facilitate the design of a linguistically, culturally, and contextually appropriate fatherhood intervention. The emergent nature of this design allowed for ongoing development and refinement of the intervention over a period of 2 years.

Subjects and Setting

We used an approach to community-based research at the level of the setting to engage community members in a Fathers' Advisory Council to develop an intervention to help fathers surmount constraints to involvement with their children (McLeroy, Norton, Kegler, Burdine, & Sumaya, 2003; Trickett, 2009). Father Advisory Council meetings and data collection occurred between November 2009 and January 2012. Inclusion criteria for Council membership were (a) African American, (b) non-resident father, (c) father of a child between the ages of 2 and 5 (because the program will target fathers of preschool aged children), and (d) commitment to participate in Council meetings. The goal of recruitment efforts was to identify a heterogeneous group of African American men in age, socioeconomic status, and educational background to provide multiple perspectives and a

sense of the likely variability that typically would be encountered working with fathers. Recruitment strategies included the use of flyers and social networking (i.e., Facebook™ and email). Flyers developed by the project director, an African American male social worker with 15 years of experience working with fathers, displayed a picture of an African American father with his young child and provided a brief description of the project, eligibility criteria, and the project contact number. Flyers were distributed to 5 community based social service programs, 5 day care centers, 5 health facilities, 1 community-based social service program with a focus on educational preparation, and 20 key community informants. These sites and key community informants were located or conducted business throughout 24 community-areas that ranged from 77 to 98% African American (Woldemichael et al., 2011). The median income of families in these communities ranged from \$10,739 to \$33,663 (Woldemichael et al., 2011).

Men responding to the flyers in person or over the telephone received a detailed explanation of the purpose of the advisory council (i.e., to collaborate in the development of a fatherhood intervention) and, if interested, they were screened for eligibility. Of the 23 men who called our offices and expressed an interest in participating in the Council, 19 had seen or been given a flyer by a community informant, and 4 were recruited through social networking among the participants who shared flyers and information with friends and family members. Ten men who expressed interest in the Council did not meet the eligibility criteria (6 could not commit to attend the meetings and 4 were living with their child on a full time basis). Those who were eligible and interested completed the informed consent, were administered the study interview questionnaire and were scheduled for the first Council meeting. One additional father who met the screening criteria and was fully assessed failed to respond to attempted contacts and did not participate in any Council meetings. Therefore, 12 fathers participated in the Council.

Measures

To gain an understanding of the characteristics of the advisory board members a demographic questionnaire was administered prior to the first Council meeting that included age, education, number and age of children, current and past volunteer work, and their perception of their involvement with their children. Fathers' involvement with their children was measured with the 19-item Index of Paternal Involvement (Index; Julion, 2002). The Index measures the frequency on a 4-point scale (0 = *no involvement* to 4 = *frequent involvement*) of fathers' involvement with their children in a variety of ways (e.g. spending time with the child, being a part of special celebrations and rituals, providing financial support, and providing discipline). Total scale scores on the Index range from 0 to 76 with higher scores indicating higher paternal involvement. Alpha reliability of the Index when administered to 211 non-resident African American fathers was .96. Content and face validity were demonstrated in a review by five fatherhood research experts, and construct validity were supported by a study comparing involvement between resident and nonresident fathers (Julion, 2002; Julion et al., 2007).

A scoring sheet developed by research team members was used to examine each video scene that was selected for inclusion in the fatherhood program. The Council members scored each scene twice, first for relevance and then for usefulness. Relevance determined whether the Council members believed that they and the fathers they knew could relate to the content of the scene, and was measured on a 5-point scale from not relevant to very relevant. Usefulness ascertained whether the scene would be useful in stimulating group discussion and was measured on a 5-point scale from not useful to very useful.

Procedures

The intervention development was conducted over a 2-year period within a large Midwestern urban setting. A total of 13 Council focus group meetings were held at a major academic medical center with conference meeting room space accommodating group members and members of the research team. This site was conveniently located near rapid transit, including train and bus stops, and readily accessible by automobile. Fathers who did not live in the immediate community expressed comfort because most knew family and friends in the area, or had previously come to the academic medical center to visit or to receive health care.

The project was approved by the institutional review board of a private Midwestern university. Telephone or email reminders were made to the members the week before each advisory council meeting. At the time of the first advisory council meeting, fathers were reminded of the purpose of the project. Council meetings were facilitated by the African American male project director and two (one African American and one White) female nurse scientists. All 13 Council meetings were audio recorded to minimize the chance that information would be missed during note taking. Each meeting had an agenda that was shared with participants and the facilitators used an interview guide to facilitate group discussion. Dinner was served during each advisory meeting. At the end of each meeting, the men were given a \$30.00 gift card and reimbursement for their transportation.

Protocol

The focus group interview guides covered program format, content, video scene and handout development, and evaluation of video scene relevance. At the start of each meeting time was taken to check in with the fathers, to see how things were going in their lives and with their children, and to allow them to reflect on their experience being involved in the Council. In the first two meetings we sought feedback on acceptable format and number of sessions for the fatherhood program. Based upon our prior research conducting preventive parent training with families in low-income urban communities, we proposed to the Council a video-based group discussion format for the intervention. This format involves short-videotaped scenes illustrating specific content areas of the program to highlight program principles and to facilitate discussions among program participants (Gross et al., 2003; Gross et al., 2007; Oliffe, Ogradniczuk, Bottorff, Hislop, & Halpin, 2009; Webster-Stratton, 1998). Council members were shown examples of video scenes used in a program developed by Gross et al. (2007). They were asked whether they believed this format would be acceptable and facilitate group discussion among African American fathers. Format was addressed prior to content because we wanted to learn early in the process whether the intervention format refined and utilized with parents was also appropriate for use with fathers alone. We next queried fathers about their perspectives on the total number of sessions in the program and the intervals between the sessions.

The next four meetings were focused on program content. An initial list of program topics was presented to the Council based on the Billingsley model (Billingsley, 1992), prior research conducted with fathers who were asked about what they need in order to be the fathers they wanted to be and the fathers their children needed (Julion, 2002), and the fatherhood literature (Caldwell et al., 2004; Castillo et al., 2012; Cornille, Barlow, & Cleveland, 2006). The initial list of program topics covered the importance of fathers, communication, child rearing, barriers to father involvement, and issues related to fathers involved in the correctional system. The Council members were asked to select the content they deemed most important to promoting the involvement of non-resident African American fathers in their children's lives. They were also encouraged to discuss additional content that they felt needed to be added to the list.

Meetings 7 through 10 were focused on video scene and handout development including suggestions for filming locations, ways to recruit potential actors (i.e., fathers), video scene selection, dialect, and written materials for the program. Following each of these meetings, filming commenced in the community, and raw footage was brought back to the Council. The men were asked to view the footage and comment on the appropriateness of the content, location, and language used by fathers selected to participate in the film. Council members also evaluated handouts and practice assignments that were developed to reinforce learning of new principles. The Council evaluated these materials for content, language, appearance and overall acceptability.

The remaining three Council meetings (11–13) were used for reviewing edited scenes and assessing relevance. The advisory council members viewed 258 video scenes over the course of three meetings each lasting 2 1/2 hours. After viewing and discussing each scene, Council members wrote down their scores for relevance and usefulness. Their discussions and mean scores for each scene served as the rationale for replacing unacceptable scenes.

Data Analysis

Digital recordings of the Council meetings were transcribed verbatim, compared to field notes, and then listened to by the first author to correct any inaccuracies by the transcriptionist. Minor inaccuracies resulting from the transcriptionist's misunderstanding of words were noted and corrected. An initial list of codes was developed by the authors based upon the agenda and facilitator guides used in the Council meetings (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Each transcript was coded independently by the first author and a research assistant who then met several times to group the codes into categories and add definitions for each code so that the coding process was consistent. The remaining authors then met with the first author and research assistant to confirm the codes and findings. In light of the emerging nature of intervention development, new codes were added as necessary as additional Council meetings were held. The codes and categories were then examined for their relationship to aspects of the emerging fatherhood program (i.e., format, content, video scene development) and fathers' perspectives on the benefits of their participation in the Council).

Data analysis strategies for quantitative data (demographics, involvement scores, and video-scene ratings) included descriptive statistics, calculation of total involvement scores, and mean ratings of video scenes' relevance and usefulness.

Results

FAC Member Characteristics and Attendance

Demographics of the Council members are presented in Table 1. The mean age of fathers was 35.6 years (range = 21–44). Every father had at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5 in order to satisfy inclusion criteria. However, on average fathers had three children (range = 1–9), whose ages ranged from 1 to 26 years of age. Fifty percent of the fathers were involved in volunteer work, including serving as a “classroom Dad” for their child's preschool class and mentoring young fathers where they lived and worked. Self-rated father involvement was high as measured by the Index of Paternal Involvement (Mean = 66; range = 54 – 76), despite most fathers voicing constraints to maintaining their involvement with their children.

Overall, fathers attended half of the advisory council meetings (mean= 6.58). Thirty-three percent ($n = 4$) of the fathers attended 1–3 meetings, 25% ($n = 3$) of the fathers attended 4–6 meetings, and 42% ($n = 5$) of the fathers attended more than 6 meetings. Individual attendance of each father is displayed in Table 2. The primary reasons for non-attendance at

Council meetings were conflicting school and work schedules and child-related commitments.

Program Format

Council members endorsed and supported the proposed program format. They indicated that a video format would be much more engaging to fathers than a didactic approach. They believed that fathers would be engaged and comfortable participating in group discussions with other non-resident fathers. When asked about the length of each session and the duration of the program, all fathers in attendance agreed that each session should last 1 ½ to 2 hours; 60% agreed that the program duration should not exceed 12 weeks. The range of other suggestions for program duration was from 2 to 6 months. Thus the duration of the program was set at 9 weeks for fathers in community settings, with three sessions added to address the unique concerns of fathers who were separated from their children due to involvement in the correctional system (i.e., total program = 12 sessions). They agreed that weekly practice assignments would help to reinforce information learned between sessions, but they cautioned to limit this to something that could be “completed quickly.” Once the format of the program was endorsed, the focus of the Council meetings moved toward program content and video scene and handout development.

Program Name and Content

Over the course of the Council meetings, members provided 51 suggestions for naming the fatherhood program. The final program name, *Building Bridges to Fatherhood* was reached by group consensus. Council members sanctioned the division of the program content into three core units: (a) *Fatherhood*, aimed at bolstering fathers’ knowledge and confidence; (b) *Communication*, aimed at helping fathers effectively interact with their children’s co-parent; and (c) *Parenting*, focused on nurturing and guiding young children. The three units were further divided into three sessions to align with the Council members’ decision that 9 weeks was the ideal length of time for the core program. Based on Council members’ advice to allow ample time for fathers to voice their opinions and concerns, the amount of content was structured to be covered comfortably in a 2-hour session. To address the needs of currently or previously incarcerated fathers, a supplemental 3-session unit, *Fathering from the Inside*, focused on fathers maintaining relationships with their children, was developed. With the addition of the fourth unit, Council members were confident that the program would be useful to African American non-resident fathers across community and correctional settings. Table 3 shows the units and sessions.

Council members agreed with the content grouping, and suggested ways for making the core and supplemental sessions relevant to their experiences as non-resident African American fathers. They shared stories of their own struggles and challenges as non-resident African American fathers. For example, they described not wanting to be perceived as a “good-time-daddy.” They defined this type of father as one who only engaged in “fun activities” with his children, and “seldom provides discipline and guidance.” Council members expressed their disdain with the concept of “time-outs.” They considered this discipline strategy one that would not resonate with African American fathers because they believed that it was based upon White middle class parenting practices. When asked whether an alternative strategy would be more relevant, they suggested using “coaching” language to describe this parenting strategy, rather than eliminating it all together. One father described it this way: “Take the child out of the game and sit ‘em on the bench for a while so he can think about what he did wrong.” Council members also felt that the program should address the challenges of reestablishing relationships with children after release from correctional settings as “helping re-integrating fathers with their children, after they been incarcerated or

have been away from their children for a long time.” Accordingly, the program includes this content in the unit developed for fathers with involvement in the correctional system.

Council members suggested that handouts would be helpful so that fathers who participated in the program could share what they had learned in the group with other people who also cared for their children. They believed also that it was important for fathers to practice what they learned when they were with their children. They believed that the handouts and practice assignments would help serve these purposes. They were particularly proud of a handout that was developed to portray “keeping your cool,” a concept that came directly from the members of the Council. Keeping your cool meant that despite being angry and frustrated with their children’s mothers, fathers needed to be able to remain calm so that they did not jeopardize their opportunities to spend time with their children. They also assisted in developing a pictorial/narrative handout for “problem solving” and “stress reduction.”

Video Scene Development

Council members provided guidance on video scene development by recommending filming locations and the type of video scenes that should be filmed to deliver the content. For example, they suggested filming scenes in a barbershop with men “sharing their parenting experiences.” Historically, the barber shop represents a safe-haven for African American men to communicate freely (Alexander, 2003; Hess et al., 2007; Victor et al., 2009). Council members suggested also filming in a gymnasium where younger African American men tend to gather. They recommended having father and child interactions filmed within the child’s mother’s home, within the father’s home, and at public settings such as a park or community center. Council members guided the selection of fathers to be filmed for the video scenes. They suggested having a group of “real fathers” (non-actors) share their own experiences in areas such as “negotiating visiting time.” They made it clear that they wanted a mix of older and younger African American fathers. Recruitment of fathers through a casting agency yield 22 interested fathers of whom 11 were casted. The yield of young fathers, however, was low. The production company then used social networking sites to recruit young fathers. Using this strategy, 11 fathers below the age of 25 expressed interest, and 8 of these were casted. Over 22 hours of footage were taped with the assistance of a producer and film crew from a local film production company.

Another key component of the videotape program was the on-screen narrator who served as a trusted expert to introduce program concepts, video scenes, and parenting strategies, and to provide factual information. For example, in the session on problem solving, the narrator describes the psychological and physiological impact of stress on fathers. The Council members believed that a narrator needed to portray the wisdom of President Obama, the humor of Bernie Mac, (a well known African American comedian; Mac & Fenjves, 2004), and the experiences of being a real non-resident father. The Council members believed that a narrator with these characteristics would be one that group members would listen to, respect, and find engaging. The narrator was recruited through a local casting company and three narrators were screened by the authors.

The Council provided valuable lessons on men’s speech, which informed the narrator’s script. Throughout the Council meetings, the research team members noted that fathers often used aphorisms, brief statements expressing wise observations on life (i.e., life-lessons; Jordan-Jackson & Davis, 2005; McGlone & Tofighbakhsh, 2000). When this was brought to their attention, the members of the Council indicated that this form of speech resonated with African American men. They endorsed examples of aphorisms to include in the narrative scripts such as this one from the Reverend Jessie Jackson: “Your children need your presence more than your presents” (Rice, 2011). They also provided their own aphorisms,

often from unknown authors such as: “If you do right, right will follow you. If you do wrong, wrong will catch up to you.” Narrator scripts were outlined following input from the Council, and revised based upon Council member feedback.

Program Relevance (Video Review)

Three research team members viewed the film footage (representing over 22 hours of filming) and together agreed on 2 hours of the 259 most engaging scenes for usefulness and relevance scoring by the Council. Of the scenes reviewed by the Council, 19 were eliminated, either because they received a usefulness or relevance score of <3 (on the 5-point scale), or because they were repetitive with other scenes that the research team members felt better supported program content. Reasons for low scores from the Council varied from poor or contrived acting to inappropriate material. For example, the Council members thought a scene of a father being open about his mother’s struggles with substance abuse to illustrate the challenges of growing up without positive father involvement was distracting. The Council members helped to group the remaining 240 scenes into the appropriate program unit. For example, a scene of a father struggling to get his young daughter to sit down with him and read was used to reinforce the challenges and importance of reading as a routine and placed in the session that addressed the importance of routines and traditions to children’s development (Unit 3, Session 1; Understanding your Children). A selection of vignettes grouped according to unit is shown in Table 4.

Reflections on Participation in Program Development

When the Council members were asked to reflect on their participation in the development of a program for African American fathers, three major themes emerged. First, they addressed the benefit they personally gained from the experience. Michael (pseudonym), a 31-year old employed, college educated father of one child said:

Coming to this group is one of the most therapeutic things I could have done... There are times when I thought I couldn’t bear going through what I’m going through with my child’s mother... At times I wanted to give up, and coming to FAC meetings gave me support and motivation and a reason why not to give up.

Similarly, Lamar, a 24-year old unemployed high school graduate and father of one said:

Watching the footage and kicking it [talking] with a lot of people that’s older than me, it kind of like made my maturity level... like gave me a quick boost. And like this is really serious... And I said, maybe the FAC meetings do, do something.

Byron, a 44-year old divorced father of three children with some college education and full time employment said:

I can’t talk to my family members. I can’t talk to my brothers [siblings].... So for men to have this form of an outlet is real therapeutic. This support group if you will... is superb for guys like us.

The second theme we discerned was the sense of altruism and helping other men like themselves succeed in their quest to be better parents. Lawrence, a 42-year old never-married unemployed father of nine children, voiced his desire to have an impact on nonresident fatherhood in the African American community. As he observed: “I want to give as much information as possible to the research project in order to help change how the African American community deals with the issue of non-custodial fathers.” Michael also voiced his desire to help other fathers as follows:

I have issues with the mother of my child. The mother uses my child as a pawn. I would like to be part of the FAC [Fathers Advisory Council] to help create a

program where I can gain and give insight to future fathers that might have similar issues.

The third theme was Council members endorsing the group meetings as a viable means of giving and receiving support from fathers with similar fathering concerns. According to Byron: “Personally, I was looking for something that serves as much like this serves... in terms of sitting around a round table of gentlemen who have similar ideas, similar situations, experiences and can speak about it.” Similarly, Bernard, a 43-year old unemployed father of five children with some college education believed that the group could serve as a source of social support for fathers, “helping fathers with restoring the parent-child relationship. The group dynamic would bring other men to that father [father seeking support]... and all of them going through this dynamic together.”

Cost of Sessions

The cost of implementing 13 focus group sessions for 12 advisory council members was \$30/Council member/session. The cost of food averaged \$90.00 per session and the cost of transportation reimbursement (\$7.00 for parking and \$5.00 passes for fathers taking public transportation) amounted to \$41.00 per session. The total cost of food and transportation reimbursement averaged \$335.00 per meeting. Although the cost might seem high, we believe it is warranted, in light of the staggering financial, psychological, and other costs that father absence has on African American children, fathers, families, and communities.

Discussion

The collaboration between the researchers/authors of this paper and the Council members was grounded in mutual trust and respect, and capitalized on the strengths of the researchers, including their involvement in the African American community, their participation in community-based services aimed at supporting fathers, their extensive experience with culturally relevant program development, and their experience with parenting research. The partnership was also rooted in a shared desire to make a difference in the lives of these fathers.

The insights of the Council informed the development of the *Building Bridges to Fatherhood* program for African American non-resident fathers, addressed fathers’ motivations for being involved in program development, and affirmed the acceptance of group-based program formats for interacting with fathers. The Council members who agreed to participate in this research study were motivated to join the Council because they wanted to help other fathers and help their communities (AbdulAdil & Farmer, 2006; Cunningham, 2006; Johnson, 2010). They also benefited from their participation in the study because of the social support they received from their fellow Council members and from the skills they learned that enabled them to have better relationships with their children and their children’s mothers. Thus, the multiple benefits of participation coupled with Council members’ pivotal roles as valued and trusted partners spurred their ongoing 2-year participation in the Council despite competing demands and only small tangible incentives (Caldwell et al., 2004; Caldwell, Zimmerman, & Isichei, 2001).

Despite literature supporting the hesitancy of African American men to participate in group-based programs and interventions (Victor et al., 2009; Wellington, White, & Liopsis, 2006; Zhang, Galanek, Strauss, & Siminoff, 2008), Council members affirmed their willingness actively to participate in a group-based alliance with researchers and believed that fathers in community and correctional settings would also willingly participate in a group-based fatherhood intervention.

Yet, even when fathers are motivated and there is mutual trust, researchers must reach out to them at the onset of the process so that they are aware of the high regard placed on their participation. Researchers must conduct father-focused recruitment in venues that African American fathers frequent, such as barber shops, gymnasiums, parks, and sporting events. Researchers must also use recruitment strategies that employ interpersonal interactions via community-based programs, key-informant networks, and word-of-mouth. Engaging fathers via social media and email is efficient and effective despite literature that calls into question the availability of Internet access in under-resourced communities (Durette, Marrs, & Gray, 2011; Gilmour, 2007; Icard, Bourjolly, & Siddiqui, 2003). The language and vernacular used in recruitment must resonate with the styles and preferences of the fathers (e.g., using coaching analogies and aphorisms). Moreover, these same research driven implications have value and relevance to health and social service providers in building programs that engage African American fathers in their care and the care of their families.

Future Implications

To date, a small pilot study has been conducted with the *Building Bridges to Fatherhood* program for acceptance and feasibility. In future research we will examine program efficacy in a randomized clinical trial and address the final steps in Aranda's intervention development framework that is, detailing the specific program outcomes and outcome measures, and implementation fidelity. If shown to be efficacious, the *Building Bridges to Fatherhood* program should be readily sustainable within an array of fatherhood services that provide for the comprehensive needs of African American fathers living apart from their children. Although targeted to African American nonresident fathers, the successful strategies we used in recruiting and involving them in intervention development might have broader application for researchers and practitioners seeking input from other groups targeted for preventive interventions.

Conclusions

Lessons learned from this research study provide an expanded view of African American non-resident fathers that extends beyond stereotypical depictions of uninvolved, uninterested, financially negligent, and selfish men. The group of African American non-resident fathers convened into the Fathers Advisory Council took their responsibility as fathers quite seriously, and believed that inherent in their responsibility was the need to help other fathers do the same. As one father put it: "Where it's being looked at now as a punch line that fatherhood is an option... What I would stress to younger men [is] that it's not... Fatherhood is not an option. It's detrimental to the life of that child if you are not around." Collaborating with members of the intended audience on intervention development is also not an option, particularly if nursing is to continue advancing nursing science by challenging the norms and looking for innovations beyond conventional thought.

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Table 1

Fathers Advisory Council Demographics (n = 12)

| Variables | n | (%) |
|--|---|------|
| Current relationship status | | |
| Married | 2 | 16.7 |
| Separated/divorced | 6 | 50 |
| Never married | 4 | 33.3 |
| Education | | |
| Less than high school | 1 | 8.3 |
| Graduated high school | 2 | 16.7 |
| Associate degree/trade/vocational school | 2 | 16.7 |
| Some college/college degree | 7 | 58.3 |
| Job status | | |
| Full time | 6 | 50 |
| Not working | 3 | 25 |
| Going to school | 2 | 16.7 |
| Going to school and working | 1 | 8.3 |
| Reported income per month | | |
| less than \$400 | 5 | 42 |
| \$401 – 900 | 1 | 8.3 |
| \$901 – 1,800 | 2 | 16.7 |
| \$1,801 – 2,500 | 3 | 25 |
| \$3,351 – 4,160 | 1 | 8.3 |
| Felony conviction | | |
| Yes | 3 | 25 |
| No | 9 | 75 |
| Jail time while a father | | |
| Yes | 3 | 25 |
| No | 9 | 75 |
| Number of mothers of children ^a | | |
| 1 | 7 | 58.3 |
| 2 | 1 | 8.3 |
| 3 | 4 | 33.3 |
| Live with children | | |
| Live with some children | 3 | 25 |
| Live with no children | 9 | 75 |
| Average hours spent per day with child | | |
| 0 to 4 hours | 3 | 25 |

| Variables | <i>n</i> | (%) |
|---|----------|------|
| 10–15 hours | 4 | 33.3 |
| Variable time ranging from summers to weekends only | 5 | 41.7 |

Note.

^aDenotes the number of women with which fathers have had children.

Table 2

Father Advisory Council (FAC) Member Attendance by Meeting

| Topic of FAC Meeting | FAC Meeting | Attendance (<i>n</i> = 12) | Mean % Attendance |
|--|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Format and number of sessions | 1 | 7 | 58 |
| | 2 | 10 | 83 |
| Program content | 3 | 6 | 50 |
| | 4 | 6 | 50 |
| | 5 | 6 | 50 |
| | 6 | 8 | 67 |
| Video scene and handout development | 7 | 9 | 75 |
| | 8 | 6 | 50 |
| | 9 | 5 | 42 |
| | 10 | 6 | 50 |
| Reviewing edited scenes and assessing relevance and usefulness | 11 | 4 | 33 |
| | 12 | 6 | 50 |
| | 13 | 7 | 58 |

Table 3**Building Bridges to Fatherhood Program Session Topics (12 sessions)**

| |
|--|
| Unit 1: Fatherhood (3 sessions) |
| Your Children Need You |
| A Journey, not a Destination |
| Know Your Rights |
| Unit 2: Communication (3 sessions) |
| Clear Communication |
| Keeping Your Cool |
| Problem Solving |
| Unit 3: Parenting (3 sessions) |
| Understanding your Children |
| Nurturing your Children |
| Guiding your Children |
| Unit 4: Fathering from the Inside (3 sessions) |
| Regaining and Sustaining Yourself |
| Rebuilding Important Relationships |
| Reconnecting with your Children |

Table 4

Sample Video Vignettes from the Building Bridges to Fatherhood Program

| |
|--|
| Unit 1: Fatherhood |
| Three fathers describe growing up without their fathers, the impact it had on them and not wanting to repeat the same mistakes. * <i>This vignette helps fathers learn about the ways children benefit from their fathers positive involvement.</i> |
| Unit 2: Communication |
| Vignette of father describing the importance of “keeping his cool” (e.g., maintaining his composure) while interacting with his child’s mother so that he does not jeopardize his visitation with his child. * <i>This vignette is intended to help fathers deal with stressful interpersonal situations while staying focused on their goals as fathers.</i> |
| Unit 3: Parenting |
| Vignette of father taking his son out of the game and sitting him on the bench for fighting with a friend (i.e. time outs). * <i>This vignette demonstrates one of several discipline strategies in the program that has been reframed in a way that is acceptable to AA fathers.</i> |
| Unit 4: Fathering from the Inside |
| Scene of father describing how he felt when his young child cried when he tried to hold her after he had spent time in jail and she hadn’t seen him in a while. * <i>This scene is intended to reinforce to fathers that reconnecting with their children is a process that takes time and commitment.</i> |