Making Daddies into Fathers: Community-Based Fatherhood Programs and the Construction of Masculinity for Low-Income African American Men

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Abstract:

In this analysis, we explore how low-income African American fathers build understandings of successful manhood in the context of community-based responsible fatherhood programs. Drawing on life history interviews with 75 men in Illinois and Indiana, we explore men's attempts to fulfill normative expectations of fatherhood while living in communities with limited resources. We examine the efforts of community-based fatherhood programs to shape alternative African American masculinities through facilitation of personal turning points and "breaks with the past," use of social support and institutional interventions, and the reframing of provision as a priority of successful fatherhood. We refer to Connell's hegemonic masculinity framework (Connell in Masculinities, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995) and discuss how both men and programs borrow from hegemonic and street masculinities to develop alternative approaches to paternal involvement for marginalized men.

Keywords: Fathers | Low-income Families | African American | Masculinities

Article:

> I've had to push my friends aside. I hang out with my brother and we might go to my cousin's. That's probably it—there is nobody else. I mean, I talk to you, but I can't trust you. And I don't want to waste my time trying to find out if I could trust you. There is a guy in this parenting class, and last week we left and we walked to the bus on Princeton Drive. He seemed kind of cool, and I could see myself doing the same things as him. He's cool, and he is telling me I'm cool, but I still don't trust this guy. I don't know if he is going to take me in the alley and see how much money I have. I'm watching him, because I've put up many fronts and I know that people still do it. When you first get [to the program], you don't want everybody to know everything about your life, so you beat around the bush. So now, I just keep it real (see also Roy 2004a).

Otis came to a "responsible fatherhood" program at a critical moment in his life. At 25 years of age, he had recently been released from a correctional facility back into the Chicago neighborhoods. Born and raised on the city's West side, he knew that "if we had stayed there, maybe one of us would be dead." Although his mother moved him and his brother out of the city, Otis bounced through different high schools and became involved with local gangs. "Everyone told me I was stupid and going to go to jail, so I started to show them I was crazy and stupid" he said. "Now, everybody is scared of me. Anything will lead to fighting, so they just leave me alone." He eventually served three sentences in jail, for dealing drugs and for battery.

Otis's first daughter was born when he turned 20, and he reacted with disbelief and confusion. "I told [my girlfriend], 'You better quit playing with me.' I didn't believe her for a few days, but then I started thinking that I had to get a damn job." He found a job, working from 5 p.m. to midnight at a grocery store in the Chicago suburbs. After 3 months, he left; he could not earn enough money to support his girlfriend and child. He cycled back into dealing, was arrested and served time in prison, and returned to his neighborhood to recommit himself to look for a job at 23, with the birth of his second daughter to another partner.

> I looked, every day, for a month solid. I would go to 5–6 different places. I wasn't qualified. I knew I had to get some money. I have been taking care of myself since I was 15. I don't want to depend on anybody. There are too many jobs, and I have work experience, but I have the X on my back from doing time. I am trying to do something with the odds against me, and many times I get frustrated.

Otis felt increased urgency to contribute to his children's lives. He began to regret that he had children at such a young age. He speculated, "I wish I waited a while to have kids. That threw a monkey wrench into everything. I love my daughters, but if I didn't have my kids, there's no telling what I would be doing. I would be ahead of where I am at now, I would be working." With a pattern of incarceration and sporadic employment, the courts did not feel that Otis could be a stable parent when his oldest daughter was put up for foster care, due to his first partner's substance abuse. He "almost went off" in the courtroom when the judge prepared to declare her to be "property of the state," but Otis's mother stepped in to keep him calm and to take custody.

Not wanting to risk losing another child to "the system," he realized that he had a great deal of catching up to do to become an independent adult and a supportive father. Otis asserted that "I have got my stars and stripes, I have had my fun. But I am pushing all of that to the side. It's for those young guys—I'm through with it. I need to change my attitude, stop taking my anger out on whoever is closest to me." He emphasized how he had grown older and how he feared being alone—"that there is no one there to love me." Although he was committed to the mother of his second daughter, who stuck with him throughout his recent period in jail, he noted that the stress of living in poverty made it difficult to stay together. He noted, "Now, when I have to go get some Pampers, I'm broke. It's so much stress to make sure the baby has food and everything. I can go without for a day, but she has to eat."

In the early 1990s, responsible fatherhood (RF) programs with federal and private funding emerged to encourage the involvement of noncustodial parents like Otis with their children. The general goal of these programs was to increase rates of paternity establishment and child support payments to the state (Curran and Abrams 2000). For most programs, men were eligible for access to resources if their children were recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Men voluntarily enrolled in the programs, although others were mandated to participate through

child support courts. RF programs also became critical points at which to establish paternity, providing guidance in filling out forms during case management meetings and even in hospital stays during the birth of children.

One such RF program in Chicago recruited men in local work release facilities who might be willing to make some changes in their lives in order to become more involved with their children. Through the 1970s and 1980s, work release programs were created as minimum security facilities focused exclusively on men's participation in work as a measure of rehabilitation (Roy 2005). These programs housed offenders of non-violent crimes (such as alcohol or drug related violations, or failure to pay child support) and required offenders to take jobs in the community in order to pay rent and related expenses. Otis attended one of these sessions and wondered "What do they want with me?"

> But Martin respected me, and we talked, and he said that he could give me passes to get out of [the correctional facility and come to a fathering class]. The first day was okay, and the second day he started talking about money, and he got my attention because I liked the way that he talked. I was thinking about saving money and everything, and then they talked about jobs and interviews, and children, and we acted out some scenes about children. I had a ball. I started enjoying myself. I didn't have to come back, but I did. I learned how to conduct myself, how to write a resume, how to spend more time with my kids, how to talk to them. It's inspiring. That class should be all week long.

Otis was in transition, from the correctional facility back to daily life with his second partner and child. He made moves to forsake hustling and hanging out with his friends. However, he also knew that he did not measure up as a self-sufficient male adult with a stable job, a house, and a marriage. "This class is helping me to figure things out," he commented, "to figure out how to get mine." In this transitional time, Otis struggled in particular with his sense of being a man—and specifically, a father.

> If I can take care of my kid's food, clothing, shelter, I might feel good for the rest of the week, or the rest of the month. But it's not guaranteed. I'm making it up as I go. Nobody taught me this. I never had a father, and my brother doesn't have any kids. One of my daughters lives with my mother, and I'm struggling to take care of both of them, and I can't do it. So, to be honest, I do not think that I am really a father yet. I don't think that I am what I want to be as a father yet. I am really just a dad.

In this study, we explore how 75 low-income African American fathers build understandings of successful manhood in the context of two community-based responsible fatherhood programs. We have two related purposes in this analysis. One purpose is to enhance understanding of the conceptions of fatherhood held by these fathers. Specifically, we will examine men's attempts to fulfill normative expectations of fatherhood while living in communities with limited resources. The second purpose is to enhance understanding of how involvement in RF programs can alter these conceptions of fatherhood. We focus on programmatic strategies to facilitate personal turning points, to administer social support and institutional interventions, and to reframe successful fathering as contact with children rather than economic provision.

Background

Achievement of adult male status is reflected in the ability to have and support children (Marsiglio and Pleck 2004). Over the past century, through industrialization and men's movement out of families to locate employment, provision of support has played the critical role in men's status in families (Griswold 1993). Even as more mothers entered the labor force and real wage declined for men—and the provider role subsequently "fell" in status (Bernard 1981)—the ability to support children continues to distinguish which men are considered by society to be "good fathers" and which "bad fathers" (Furstenberg 1988; see also Roy 2004b).

One way to conceptualize valuations of providing with regard to father roles is to link them explicitly to forms of masculinity (see Fig. 1). Connell (1995) defined the pattern of practices that allow men's dominance over women to continue as hegemonic masculinity (A in Fig. 1). It represents the currently most honored way of being a man, in that men must position themselves in relation to hegemonic masculinity and gain legitimacy as men through global subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemony, in this way, is a configuration of gender practices that includes domination by force as well as cultural consent and institutionalization. With regard to fathering expectations, it encourages men to prioritize the role of providing in legitimate contexts, as full-time workers in established wage labor markets. Such providing offers men resources to secure independence and control in social interaction, including family life. Providing is also equated with care—i.e., good providers do so in order to care for their families (Christiansen and Palkovitz 2001).
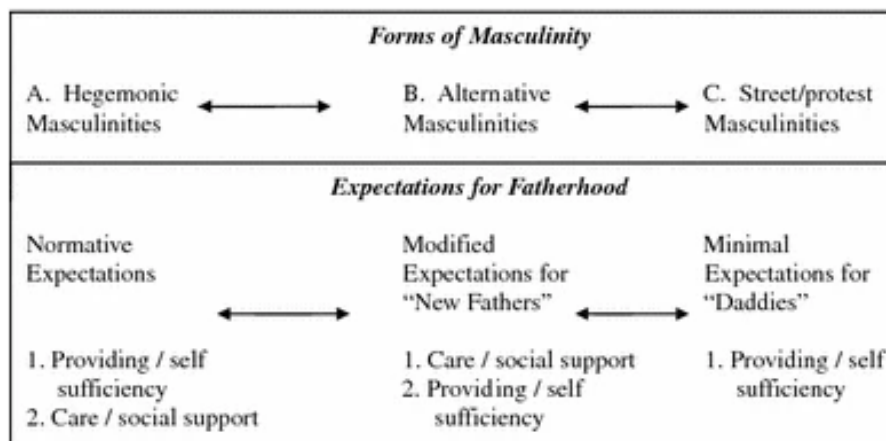

Figure 1. Continuum of masculinities and related fatherhood expectations

However, as there are different and conflicting ways to be a man, hegemonic masculinity acknowledges a hierarchy among a diversity of masculinities. Some men and women in contemporary families have critically challenged the prioritization of providing and the dominance of men in family life. Norms for contemporary fatherhood appear to be shifting toward integration of provider expectations with expectations for caregiving (LaRossa 1997; Townsend 2002). These scripts for "nurturant" or "responsible" fatherhood have opened up alternative spaces for new expressions of masculinity (B in Fig. 1), although they usually prescribe middle-class, European American, heterosexual experiences (Connell 1995).

Finally, actors in public systems, including law enforcement, courts of law, or employers in the mainstream workforce, may marginalize or "ghetto-ize" some men through harassment and

discrimination. In effect, identities and experiences of these men are subordinated to hegemonic assumptions about "how to be a man" by social institutions that organize private life and cultural processes through direct interactions and ideology (Connell 1987). Men disadvantaged by racial, ethnic, or class inequalities may reject privileged avenues to manhood (such as being a good provider) and instead craft different ways to "be a man."

Such street or protest masculinities (C in Fig. 1) draw on themes of hegemonic masculinity and rework them in the context of poverty and limited economic and cultural resources (Connell 1995). For example, Weis (2004) examined working class White men who are able to articulate but unable to live "settled" gender relations within a middle-class lifestyle. Other studies addressed workers in Silicon Valley (Cooper 2000), citizens of the corner bar (Duneier 1992), Jamaican protestors in London (Mac An Ghaill 1994), Puerto Rican fathers and drug dealers in search of respect (Bourgois 1991), and tsotsi bad boys in the Soweto streets (Morrell 2001). Connell argued that the expressions of oppressed men embrace both masculinity and stigma, often in a heightened concern with credibility. These studies also demonstrated how marginalized men resist by maintaining their aspirations to the hegemonic goals of autonomy over and mastery of one's environment (Staples 1982, p. 2). In this way, street versions of masculinity encourage men to pursue resources by any means necessary, to guarantee survival. Neither street nor hegemonic sets of fathering expectations are conducive to care for children by fathers.

Achieving autonomy and control over one's life opportunities have become increasingly difficult for African American men (Mincy 2006). In the postindustrial political economy, wage labor relegates poor African American men to sources of contingent labor which may be outsourced to relocated businesses outside of major urban communities (Wilson 1996). Due to lack of job networks, poor information about changing technologies, and limited educational opportunities, men may struggle for years to find a pathway to legitimate full-time jobs (Johnson 2000; Young 2006). Failure to become a self-sufficient provider leads some low-income fathers to pursue alternative means to secure respect and status in families (Liebow 1967), such as local underground economies (Edin and Nelson 2001). At the same time, the war on drugs, with sentencing requirements and racial profiling, has led to the greatest shift in racial composition in prison inmates in U.S. history (Hallinan 2001). Further, during critical social changes such as the legacy of slavery, the Great Migration, and deindustrialization and globalization, Burton and Snyder (1998) noted how White men's accumulation and use of resources have shaped Black men's experiences as fathers.

Using an explicitly structural and historical analysis of masculinity (see also Coltrane 1994), Staples (1982) argued that African American men have uniquely been denied opportunities to fulfill minimal requirements of masculinity, which would include life-sustaining employment and the ability to support their families. Low-income and middle-class men of color aspire to be providers and caregivers (Cazenave 1979; Harris et al. 1994; Jarrett et al. 2002), but they encounter unique challenges, such as role strain due to inability to provide for families (Bowman and Sanders 1998) or residence in neighborhoods with police and gang presence that threatens both themselves and their children (Roy 2004b).

One strategy to deal with marginalization has been the "cool pose," which provides Black men safety through social distance and appearance of physical and social strength (Gibbs 1988; Majors and Billson 1992). Alongside the emergence of hip hop culture and media-fed images of hypermasculine African American men that embrace the cool pose, the denial of social or material resources to achieve successful masculinity has led to a type of street masculinity for low-income men of color (Anderson 1990).

Hunter and Davis (1992) assert that African American men are not limited to a singular protest masculinity. They have built varied understandings of successful manhood during cycles of crisis and survival, "with varied tools and avenues to define themselves and negotiate manhood" (p. 475). The use of these tools and resources (including self determination, accountability, family values, pride, spirituality and humanism) results in a diverse set of African American masculinities. Fathers may balance normative with culturally-specific expectations for parenting in African American families, such as cooperation and egalitarian gendered roles in intricate extended family networks (Allen and Conner 1997; Hamer 2001). For example, Waller (2002) found that young non-custodial fathers in Trenton struggled to become responsible fathers despite their shortcomings as providers. They accomplished this through a different model of fatherhood, based less on biological status than social commitment to children and extended families. Young men may also attempt to readdress unstable relationships with their own fathers (Roy 2006; see also Coles 2003) or to reauthor their identities as parents through narratives that emphasize generativity across generations of African American families (Roy and Lucas 2006). Each of these strategies suggests a different way to define positive paternal involvement in context—not bound by normative expectations for good providing.

There are few policy and program interventions that provide fathers with resources and space to create positive identities. As Pate (2005) notes in his ethnographic analysis of child support policy in Wisconsin, low-income fathers are assumed to be "deadbeat dads." Evaluations of programs for unemployed nonresidential fathers, such as the Parents' Fair Share program in the early 1990s, showed a small growth in child support payments, usually attributed to a "smoke-out" effect—fathers' acknowledgement that they were earning cash in underground jobs (Edelman et al. 2006). These programs also had very poor outcomes for job placement (Johnson et al. 1999). By stressing job placement services and measuring program success by increased child support payments, responsible fatherhood (RF) programs may promote normative expectations for providing at the expense of father/child interaction (Haney and March 2003).

Other publicly and privately funded initiatives have focused less on child support payments, and more on paternal involvement with nonresidential children (Anderson and Letiecq 2005). These RF program curricula may allow low-income fathers to actively construct alternative masculinities through talk and interaction (Curran and Abrams 2000; May 2004). In this study, we explore such processes of low-income fathers' negotiation of masculinities—and how RF programs support alternative versions of masculinity that prioritize paternal caregiving alongside providing.

Methods

Sites and Sample

For this study, we integrated findings from two research projects with RF programs in large urban communities in Illinois and Indiana. The target participants for both projects were low-income nonresidential African American fathers, and although the two projects were not explicitly connected, the directors and staff used similar designs for service provision, including a curriculum which equated prioritization of providing and caregiving.

To build relationships with low-income fathers and their families, we worked closely with staff members and played an active role in both programs. The first author worked as a case manager with the Illinois program from 1997–1999. Over 300 men participated in combined

parenting and job training/placement sessions during this period, and 40 of these men were recruited into the sample. Other optional services included educational, housing and drug treatment referrals; co-parental counseling; and father/child activities. About 55% of participants enrolled in the Illinois program voluntarily (through word of mouth or agency referrals), and another 45% were mandated to participate through child support courts (which often led to initial animosity among fathers to the program). Turnover was frequent in the program, with a completion rate of 30% over 13 week sessions. Fathers often left the program frustrated with lack of opportunities, high unemployment rates (25% in some African American neighborhoods), and the consequences of the massive departure of factories in a large urban metropolitan area of the Midwest.

The second author served as a curriculum facilitator for the Indiana program from 2002–2004. This program was located 3 hours south of the Illinois program, in a smaller urban area with similar socioeconomic contexts. Over 200 men participated in a closely-regulated 11 week curriculum during this time period, and 35 men were recruited for this study. This program required attendance in education (GED completion in particular) as well as parenting, job placement, and life skills sessions, and paid participants a stipend for attendance. Most participants were voluntary, although about 25% were mandated through child support court.

Turnover was lower for this program, with a completion rate of about 75%. In comparison to the Illinois program, this program retained men who wanted to continue to receive small stipends, but it also purposively restricted class cohort sizes to eleven men at one time. The program featured more effective case management and focused on a small geographic area—local neighborhoods—whereas the Illinois program offered outreach into distant communities. However, fathers were younger by comparison to the Illinois program, which often meant that consistent jobs with good wages were even harder to come by for participants.

Active participants from program sessions were recruited for the studies. We could not conduct a truly random sampling, so instead we focused on recruiting active participants who reflected a wide age range. We explained to fathers that we were conducting research on paternal involvement, and if they agreed to participate, they signed written consent forms. Of the men who were recruited, over 90% agreed to participate and completed interviews. We lost contact with 5 men who did not participate, after they dropped out of the programs prior to completion. Turnover in these programs could be fairly high, and it is difficult to speculate on the effects of treatment exposure (attendance at program sessions) on men's construction of masculinities. In general, participants began to talk more frequently about fathering and began to see the importance of involvement as parents. These aims reflected the trend in RF programs—to introduce a discourse of "responsible fathering" and positive interactions with children.

These 75 men differed in several ways from the total sample of enrolled fathers. Systematic comparisons were conducted only with participants in the Illinois program, and this sample of 40 men differed from all other program participants with a slightly higher level of educational attainment and a higher percentage of "walk-in" referrals (Roy 1999). Fathers with more education may have participated more consistently in program sessions, and men who were voluntary referrals to the program may have been more motivated to attend the sessions.

Men varied in age: 47% (n = 35) were 23 years or younger; 33% (n = 25) were 24–34 years of age; and 20% (n = 15) were 35 years or older. Just over half of the fathers (56%, n = 42) were ex-offenders, with a similar proportion having completed high school (59%, n = 44). Almost a quarter of the fathers (23%, n = 17) were employed in full-time jobs at the time of the interview, with the large majority of participants unemployed or underemployed.

The largest group of fathers were nonresidential parents, with 45 of the 75 men in the study (60%) living with their own mothers or grandmothers, and another 8 men (11%) living on their own. Only 11% of the fathers (n = 8) were married and living consistently with their spouses, with 19% of the fathers (n = 14) living sporadically (3–4 days per week) with partners and children. Fathers had an average of 2.1 children. Upwards of 40% (n = 30) of the fathers had children in multiple households, and their paternal involvement varied from child to child.

Data Collection

We used four methods for data collection. First, we directly observed program sessions and both formal and informal father/child activities, including Kwanzaa celebrations, program graduations, and attendance at sports/cultural events. We took detailed ethnographic field notes of interactions over at least 18 months between fathers and children, program staff, and ourselves at the program sites. This method provided data on ecological processes and context (such as negotiation of dangerous neighborhoods, limited job and educational opportunities, and constrained physical mobility), barriers and supports for men's parenting, and the making of meaning in fatherhood roles. We also constructed detailed genograms for each father's extended kin system. Finally, during 2 hour sessions at the program sites, we used retrospective life history interviews to gather insight into how men gave meaning to life events that affected their abilities to act as providers and caregivers for their children. The majority of men were interviewed upon completion of job or parenting program sequences, after 2 months or more of frequent participation.

We asked extended questions in five main domains: father, child and co-parent interaction; experiences with family of origin; residential changes; employment; and education. Regarding perceptions of being a man and a father, for example, we asked: How do you show your love to your children? How important is providing in being a father—and how is providing related to other important things you do as a father? What makes someone a good father? What is it to be responsible for your children? Who taught you to be a father? We also asked about men's experiences with RF programs, including What have you gained from the program, or what would you liked to have gained but did not? Tell us about any important changes in your relationship with your children, your partner or ex-partner, employment, substance use, or your family (of origin). Fathers were asked to discuss timing and sequencing of transitions and life events, such as changes in family structure, residential movement, and shifts in paternal involvement across multiple families; these were recorded on calendar grids (using techniques found in Freedman et al. 1988).

We used a range of methods to enhance the trustworthiness of data (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Credibility and dependability of the data were enhanced by use of multiple sources of data and multiple methods of data collection, as well as prolonged engagement in the field. In-person discussions with the majority of the fathers some weeks after their interviews (i.e., member checks) were used to check our understanding of how masculinities were constructed in the RF programs. Interviews were recorded on audiotapes and transcribed, and interview and field note texts were coded using QSR NUDist software. Pseudonyms were used for participants.

Analyses

We adapted a constant comparative method of analytic induction from basic elements of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In the first phase of coding, both of the authors

developed a scheme through open coding of all 75 interview texts. Sensitizing concepts (van den Hoonard 1997) from prior studies (including codes for hegemonic and street masculinities) as well as emergent themes, such as "getting mine," were identified from within-case analyses. We combined the themes into a coding system with four general categories: normative masculinity (including providing, responsibility, and independence/control); street masculinity (including survival, protection, and social isolation); programmatic elements (such as support for personal change, peer group support, and advocacy with social institutions); and alternative conceptions for fatherhood (including change in priority of providing/caregiving, definition of father/daddy, and focus on personal change through involvement with children).

In the second phase of axial coding, we developed individual profiles to summarize masculinity coding and to compare the 75 texts in across-case analyses. The large majority of fathers echoed normative expectations for fathering as related to how they perceived themselves as men; similarly, most men identified diverse ways that they reacted to local environments that threatened them and limited their sense of personal control.

Finally, for some fathers who became active in a fatherhood program, these programs were catalysts for the development of alternative expectations for fatherhood that allowed fathers to reconcile normative and street masculinities. In the third phase of selective coding, we reread the texts for a final time, in order to develop a conceptual framework of the processes by which men constructed masculinities within the context of fatherhood programs.

We relied almost exclusively on interview texts for these analyses, although field notes of observations were referenced to clarify and to help interpret fathers' reports of their parenting behavior. We did not use baseline intake data from either of these programs as direct comparisons to a larger control sample, as complete intake and outcome data were not rigorously collected.

More relevant to this analysis, our primary focus in the interviews was not processes of masculinity, but construction of father roles. Nonetheless, men described how both masculinity and fatherhood were constructed in the programs. For example, we examined how fathers and the programs identified positive paternal involvement: it was not found in successful providing, but usually in regular interaction with children ("being there"); warm, close relationships; intimate knowledge of children's daily lives; and productive relations with children's mothers. It was only through repeated analyses of interview data that we began to note how men felt that father involvement reflected their success as men as well.

Recognition of class, race, and cultural boundaries—and how to conceptualize across them—was essential in each step of data collection and analysis. As a middle-aged European American academic and an African American graduate student who was an age peer of the participants, we had different backgrounds and could check each other's interpretations of fathers' experiences with their families. Fathers appeared to feel comfortable with us when we facilitated sessions on specific topics, such as parenting, exposure to media and stereotypes, and effects of incarceration. Prolonged time in the field allowed us to build rapport in personal interactions during classes, program celebrations, and home visits. Men understood that we advocated for their paternal involvement, and they were often eager to share explicit life events or challenges.

Finally, multiple sources and types of data helped us to critically examine our own assumptions and explore not only what men said, but what they did not say. For example, some fathers overemphasized a tough masculine image in a group of their peers. More often, however, men with experiences in gangs and correctional facilities downplayed these ties and did not reference them with peers (although intake data from staff informed us about these experiences). Their choices not to discuss street masculinities, and their commitments as street-smart parents,

suggested to us that construction of identities was a complex and dynamic process for low-income fathers in these two programs.

Findings

Survival Without Control: Countering Normative Expectations

Normative Expectations for Men and Fathers

Similar to the goals of hegemonic masculinity, young Black men strive for autonomy and mastery of their environments (Staples 1982). Low-income fathers in this sample relied on common adages about "being my own man" or "taking responsibility as a man." As witnesses to other men who could not gain control over their own lives, they disparaged their failures. Bear, a 21 year-old former gang member with a 1 year-old daughter, had returned to Chicago from a stint in jail in Minnesota. He was bitter that he had few models of manhood in his life.

> I got some uncles, they haven't done anything. Haven't taught me anything, because they can't be men yet, in their thirties and haven't done anything with their lives. Still depend on women. I'm not doing that, I'm depending on my own damn self. I've got to do this for my own, got to do it for Bear.

Being dependent on others ran counter to the expectations of these fathers. Rashad, a 21 year-old father who worked food concession stands at sporting events, felt that dependence on his mothers' earnings was inappropriate. He insisted "I don't want to plan to fail," indicating that his inability to contribute financially for rent and food was akin to failure as a man. For many fathers, the ability to be planful gave them a sense of control over their lives. From their perspective, men should aspire to the American Dream, even if achieving these aspirations was almost impossible. When asked where they would be in 5 years, over 75% of the men responded with a familiar message: they would be "working in an office" in a stable job, have a car, money in the bank. For most, their first goal was to own a house. Tamal, a 20 year-old father of a small infant, was unemployed and living with his mother. However, he had survived growing up in a tough neighborhood and considered himself to be "ready for anything."

> I want to have a large sum of money in the bank, work in a job, I'd like to have my own business, in the computer field. I want to own. By 25, I'll be out of school, in a career, with my own house. Happy, pretty much. My kids are with me, I'm married.

Street Masculinities in Dangerous Neighborhoods

Street masculinities emerged when men aspired to autonomy and mastery without resources to achieve these goals and within unpredictable environments. A range of ecological factors, including poor economic opportunities, lack of educational options, few jobs with good wages, rundown housing stock, and limited access to healthy food, took control out of the hands of young Black fathers. Gang activity and police presence constrained men's physical mobility in neighborhoods. To contain fathers in this way was to effectively curtail their sense of being active

men in their own communities (Roy 2004b). Moreover, the goal of control was subsumed in an overwhelming concern for day-to-day survival. Lamont was a 24 year-old student and father of a 4 year-old daughter. He had returned from military duty in Somalia with a new outlook on who he was as a man, father, son, and brother. He realized how important it was to deal with one's own survival before assuming responsibility for others' well-being as a father.

> Really, it's a "you" thing. You can't concentrate on a child thing if you yourself are spiraling down. If you can't help yourself, how can you help someone else? No matter how much you try to help, if you're not together, it's not going to work. So that's the conflict: can you raise a child, if you can't raise yourself? Are you prepared for life?

By living in dangerous communities, fathers became consumed at a young age with learning to protect themselves and their families. Most described themselves as angry men who fought frequently. Asante, a 35 year-old father of three, had recently been released from prison after shooting a man in retaliation for the shooting of his father, a shop owner. He described how he became involved in the fighting in the Cabrini Green housing projects as a teenager.

> I fell into a gang, didn't get initiated. Just said, OK man, I got your back if you got mine. We just hooked up together and it was all good; we didn't know at the time that we were in a gang. We were just stopping violence, all the time making violence.

It is important to note that men expected violence, and this became a core dimension of street masculinities: the impression of being in personal control of an unpredictable environment. Fathers knew that the preparation for violence was incompatible with family life. When Bear was asked what was most incompatible with fathering his baby daughter, he did not hesitate to choose "my attitude. Once someone pisses me off, ain't no bringing me back down. If something don't go my way, I just snap. If it's coming straight on, I can't duck it."

Often, threats and stress of low-income neighborhoods pushed men to maintain street masculinities over time, which usually further implicated men in underground activities. Miles had returned from a work-release program to try to piece together his involvement with three sons. He talked as if his life as a successful dealer was in the distant past.

> Ten years is a long time. I started selling dope, rock, reefer, once I hit 20, I was cool. I was real cool. All up and down 13th Street, everyone knew Ice Man. I used to drive a red IROC. I bought a Ford Taurus, a Chevy.

Like many older fathers, Miles began to age out of defining his masculinity in street life. His narrative illustrates that there was not a singular, stereotypical version of street masculinity for the fathers. Some men participated in violence in dangerous neighborhoods, and others did not. Most fathers noted developmental shifts in how they defined themselves as men over time. In addition, both young and old men maintained street masculinities in which isolation and withdrawal from social engagement—with peers, intimate partners, and strangers—was a critical component.

Social Isolation and Coping with Stigma

Everyday concerns over safety and fear of exposure to threatening male peers led most fathers to construct a cocoon of social isolation. Often, this distance also threatened relationships with partners and family members. Fenton realized that "people know each other but don't really bond…they rarely speak." In our interviews, we did not ask men specifically about strategies to remain safe or to keep to themselves. However, repeatedly, fathers reported that being a man in these neighborhoods required self-imposed social isolation to keep out of troubling interactions with others.

> I don't mess with anyone and they don't mess with me. (Ronald, 35 years old)
>
> I stay to myself. (Theo, 26)
>
> I don't really hang out with anybody. (Doc, 35)
>
> The neighborhood is OK if you mind your own business. (Cory, 27)
>
> I don't really associate with too many people around here. (Eddie, 24)

Far from the mastery of one's life that is a symbol of successful manhood, many of these fathers limited their interactions in order to keep control of what little they could. They reported that it was stressful to remain vigilant in the midst of unpredictable physical and social harm. Young fathers frequently suffered from the symptoms of depression. Reflective of these concerns for their physical well-being, fathers discussed their greatest fears as "dying." Men stressed that distancing themselves from family and other intimate relationships was the result of lessons learned in the street—in recognition of spatial risks and boundaries. These fears were real for 10 fathers in the sample who were shot in direct or indirect confrontations near their homes when they found themselves "in the wrong place at the wrong time" (Roy 2004b).

Social isolation could lead men to lose hope in changing their lives, particularly in the face of social expectations to be independent and self-sufficient men. Fathers were aware that internalizing street masculinities as young Black men could be problematic. Although they could serve to protect men in dangerous communities, street masculinities carried assumptions of irresponsibility and delinquency. Older fathers realized that street masculinities—acting in control, participating in violence, even social isolation—relegated them to the margins of society as failed partners, providers, and workers. Ruben, for example, worked to prevent internalizing his failures, as an ex-offender and sporadic provider, father and son. His gestures of resistance included moving his teenage sons away from gang-related activities in the housing projects, and his dedication to getting a college degree.

> Brothers think, "I'm a man, I've got to take this just as it is." Don't sell yourself a dream. You know how this society is. [You get] stuck inside your madness. No, come out of there, guy. Can't stay in there. Don't sit there and retain it. Garbage in, garbage out: get that garbage out.

The Promise of Alternative Masculinity Through Fatherhood

A unique aspect of this group of men is that, as fathers, many saw the opportunity to move past the stigma of failure and to embrace the role of parent as a second chance at successful

adulthood—and manhood. Their primary challenge was the normative assumption that fathers were first and foremost to be providers for their children. With federal and state governments pushing these men to step up as "Dollar Bills" for their families (Roy 1999), men were stressed when they could not contribute and risked an even greater sense of failure with their children. Children gave men motivation and direction, but few answers. For example, Damian tried to manage all of the stressors that began to accumulate in his life: two part-time jobs, relationships with three mothers and his four sons, courses at community college, and putting his street life behind him.

> I need to preserve my own sanity. It is that energy waiting to be released constructively. I take a walk or something. There is pressure building up at school, I got a new baby on the way, and another I just found out about. I see my world is trying to close in on me.

Putting street life behind them was not just a change of heart. Past missteps could return as new barriers to paternal involvement. Criminal records jeopardized men's futures through an unresolved process of stigma and doubt that could be reopened at any time. Isaiah, a 41 year-old father of four children, struggled to obtain custody of two preschool age daughters from the foster care system. He retained a number of dropped charges on his police record 20 years earlier, which created bias in any decision for or against custody. Combined with two felonies for unlawful use of weapons and possession of drugs, the weight of his criminal history that was "still on record" left him vulnerable to individuals who would question his integrity as a parent.

In summary, these 75 African American fathers held the same normative expectations for successful manhood that fathers in other social classes and cultures hold. However, they lived in low-income communities that afforded them little sense of control or mastery over their own lives. Their struggles for daily survival and resistance to the stigma of past failure encouraged them to develop street masculinities. Prior to participation in RF programs, younger participants held to street masculinities that emphasized engagement with peers, gestures of resistance to social norms, and expectations of violence. Older participants, in contrast, created subtle street masculinities that emphasized disengagement, the importance of safety, and "lessons learned from the street," including limitation of trust.

Fathers were not free to create new visions of masculinity. Instead, they modified normative expectations by striving to achieve social status and material success in difficult environments. For some fathers, this meant borrowing from normative and street masculinities to create new models. Damian successfully avoided incarceration and prided himself on his balancing act as a man and a father. There was no going back—only forward, to a new sense of being a father that was neither normative nor street.

> I am book smart and street smart. You can see the ghetto in me but you can also see the intelligence. I am a unique blend. I just take things that are there at the time…I cannot raise my sons behind those jail walls or dead. I made the choice to raise my sons.

Stepping up to accept responsibility as parents, many fathers realized that they could not build success by themselves, in isolation. They were drawn to sites in which they could construct

new masculinities, through interaction with other low-income nonresidential fathers in their communities.

How to Get Mine: Programmatic Supports for Alternative Masculinities

Turning Points and Breaks with the Past

Most fathers in this sample viewed parenting sessions, one-on-one counseling, and job training as a chance to make significant changes in their lives. Although they initially resisted the requirements of RF programs, men returned to the programs day after day, in part because the staff members were authentic and ready to engage men, not condemn them. Earl, a 27 year-old father in the Indiana program, noted "I wouldn't say this was just something to do. It put me in the right direction. People are interested in you and care about you. It was different than I had in the past. It gave me a lot. I can truly say that it's one of the turning points in my life." In subtle and overt ways, program staff in both sites alerted participants that they had to break with their missteps in the past. Jamal looked back on his gang activity and serving time, and realized that "these first 21 years of my life I've just jacked off. But these next 21, I'm going to stack every little chip I've got."

Although many fathers maintained the defensive posturing that was a survival tactic in dangerous neighborhoods, they also repeated mantras of needing to "get clean," "get straight," "get legit," "get settled," "get real," "get serious," and "get productive." Older fathers noted that younger men were reluctant to make real changes in their lives. Ronald, an unemployed single father of a 14 year old son, was shocked by the differences between older and younger men. He said, "I was raised by my father and I have raised my son. When some of these guys talk, I am like, 'Oh my god.' They talk about their kids, and I mean, man, what happened?" In group sessions, older men pushed young men to rethink their relationships with partners and children. Fenton described the sessions as "education to be a better father and person. It's about when the men come together to wipe out the bullshit; we ask each other to be real with us, not hostile. The most valuable thing: it is about men trying to do the right thing."

Some younger men who had never embraced a street masculinity took advantage of the sessions to confirm their own versions of respectability and manhood. Joseph, a soft-spoken 23 year-old father of 2 sons, insisted that he wanted other men to know that "you don't have to be a playboy just to get respect…You don't have to call women bitches just to have control; you don't have to curse at people to get your point across." Another young father, Tamal, described the tightrope that he had walked for many years, moving among gang members but not joining a gang himself.

> Instead of showing them I'm a thug, I showed them I'm a decent guy. And they respect that—if you're trying to do something positive, and they try to break you down and can't, then they respect you. I never stooped to their level to get respect. I kind of demanded it, in my own way.

It was a risk to consider a new way of expressing oneself and acting as an adult, a father, a man. Many fathers feared leaving the familiar daily routines and demands of their communities, even if they were dangerous. Jamal acknowledged that he needed to step up and accept responsibility for his young daughter. He still spent time with his friends in gangs and did not have

a permanent residence. He had moved out of his parents' house and had not slowed down to try to create a stable lifestyle with a job and a partner.

> I fear taking that direct stand that I need to take. I am scared of taking it. I really had to take a stand to get here to this program. I can't say why, because I know I'm capable. I will make the changes that I need to make.

For most men, moving the focus from one's self to one's children was a key dimension of their transition. Kevin, a 19 year-old father, remembered that "I couldn't get out of bed. I felt that way before. My mother, my grandmother, no one thought I was going to complete this program. But I was trying to do something with my life. It made me see beyond what I usually see for myself. They say if you can be for yourself, somebody can be for you, too."

From Isolation to Support

Similar to Curran and Abram's research with RF programs in the United States (2000), we found that the most frequently-cited benefit was the social support gained from staff and peer fathers during program sessions. If a hegemonic masculinity framework placed individualism and self sufficiency as priorities, many men in RF programs unraveled those expectations. These fathers also insisted that manhood is about asking for and being receptive to social support. Some had realized that they could not achieve success as an adult on their own, and that social interconnections might be paths to new ways of defining successes as adults.

Daily isolation in dangerous neighborhoods as young Black men meant that it was difficult for fathers to trust each other and program staff. Like many participants, Joe, a 40 year-old father transitioning out of Salvation Army for substance treatment, believed that "I was all alone in that I really love my children." He was impressed with "the comradery, the fellowship, and the sharing of ideals…I can talk to these guys and they can talk to me. The only way to improve it is a 24 hour hotline. Men have things on their minds that they would like to share." For Jordan, a much younger father at 19, it was the first time that he had participated in a group setting with "people who actually care for us." He reflected, "It was all about getting together with people, man. Taking these guys off the streets and getting them to open up. I didn't expect them to teach me how to be a father—that comes natural, you know? I just want to know a bit about what I'm doing, like when I'm home alone with the baby—what should I do now?"

Men also had few places where they could speak about their perspectives and experiences. They believed that it was best to swallow the frustrations that they encountered in trying to fulfill normative expectations, and the difficulties of incarceration, unsafe streets, stressful relationships, and separation from their children. Men frequently criticized mothers of their children. However, they also talked about their desire to find common ground and to negotiate with "babymamas." Gil, a former Marine and father of four children and two step children, was initially involved in a protracted court battle over his role in his daughter's life. He sought out the fatherhood program for support in court, and over time staff members encouraged him to develop a more effective strategy outside the courts, by sitting down to talk through issues directly with the mother of his children.

> I didn't want to hear about other men's stories about their children; I just wanted this lawyer to help me get mine. What drew me closer to the program was listening

to another brother's life, almost with the same problems that I was going through. And the openness. At first, I didn't want to open up myself to the problems I was going through—but the staff is speaking with me, constantly talking to me: You can't keep this thing shut up, you'll explode, and you might explode in the wrong way.

Fathers like Jalen turned to each other to share stories and exchange perspectives on coping with environmental constraints that shaped their daily lives.

It's hard when you walk around and keep so much inside. It is hard to get men to open up and talk about things, like their kids or their record. Because they seem scared. Maybe bad things could happen, but it feels good to talk about this….When I started talking, I just let it go. This program is like a family—we all have something in common. I used to sit back and laugh to myself, but now I tell other people—and it makes people laugh a lot too. One of the best things we can do here is laugh.

By deemphasizing the powerful myth of independence that is expected of adult men and fathers, program participants learned to create a community of men with common challenges. They drew upon a long tradition of belief in strong communities during times of crisis and celebration among African American families (Billingsley 1992; Hunter and Davis 1992). Social support also provided a safety net for men as they stepped up to make changes in their lives. As Otis confided, "If I'd never done this, I might have slipped back." Programs in Illinois and Indiana, then, both appeared to motivate and help them to secure a new paradigm for masculinity, distinct from normative or street masculinities.

Daddies, Fathers, and Providers

How did the paradigm offered in RF programs differ from normative expectations for fathers? If social support was the most significant contribution of RF programs, the most significant deficit was their failure to move men into jobs and to help them secure a status as a provider. Program staff readily recognized the multiple barriers that poor men of color faced in the labor force (Johnson et al. 1999). At times, the programs even prevented men from working. Doc painted details on sports cars in his garage; he was self employed and received cash and other goods in exchange for his labor. He was adamantly resistant to the program sessions. "I don't need a motivator. I need money," he stated. "I lose this time being here in the program. As far as me getting a real job, it is an inconvenience for me. I could be at home making money."

Both programs, as a result, had to redefine what it meant to be a successful father. They pursued two tracks: to promote success as a provider, but to get fathers engaged with children too. Men could not gain control over their lives if they were pursuing part-time, cash-in-hand jobs that afforded little stability and would not support families. Instead, the program staff emphasized the importance of raising children and being caregivers. To some extent, men had more control over these personal relationships. To retain these men, the programs had to emphasize that they could be fathers even if they could not succeed as providers. By stressing the value to one's children of "being there" day to day, men saw a way through the pain of failing as providers and into a parental role with status and value (see Allen and Conner 1997; Hamer 2001). Rollie, a part-time library

clerk after years of living on the street as a drug addict, gave unique insight into how his understanding of fatherhood changed over time.

> Before the program, I thought the only way I could approach my kid was with a job in hand. And I never had that. I learned that it's OK if I'm not working. I mean, I know I need a good job. But I can still be a father for my kids. I'm not a failure if I just spend time with them, if I help them with their homework and love them. That was a huge realization for me.

The distinction between daddies and fathers was significant in both programs. Although used as a term of affection for the closeness that many men felt toward their own fathers, the term "daddy" also represented the bare minimum of involvement for male parents. Being a daddy, as a program director stated, was "cheap and easy." The word reduced men to their physical capacity to procreate. Otis discussed how being a father involved more than acceptance of the physical existence of your child. He said, "I don't think I'm a father yet…I'm just a dad." The Chicago program created their logo as an explicit alternative: "making daddies into fathers." Rich, an addict who tried to move back into his family's household and reclaim his job as a medical technician, similarly described his goal of becoming a "real father."

> I'm through with the disappointments and resentments that I caused back in those days. This program is awesome. It helped me get in touch with myself. To be a parent, not just a daddy, but a father. Guys here have not turned their back on me. Just like the addiction, you go in, go out, go in, go out. But they're always there, like real fathers, saying "What's up, brother?" (italics added)

The term father, on the other hand, represented a social role loaded with respect and responsibility. The Indiana program emphasized its mission to "build a noble legacy of fatherhood." Program staff drew upon historical precedents in images and teachings from African American history to convey the importance of continuity and legacy between fathers and children. What was noble and valued in fatherhood did not exactly mirror the expectations for provision, independence and self sufficiency among hegemonic—and typically, White—forms of masculinity. Ramel, a 20 year-old expectant father, thought about his experiences with his own father and crafted his own understanding of successful fatherhood. For him, a father was not first and foremost a provider; instead, he was engaged in raising his children.

> Even then [my father] was coming around and offering stuff, but it doesn't mean he was a father, man. He has a set of kids and he doesn't do anything with them. He doesn't talk to them. He just isn't a man to me. What makes me so upset? Because he's man enough to bring me into this world but not man enough to be a father to me.

Both programs conveyed the message that there were alternative approaches to being a successful father and man. Some approaches were more closely aligned with traditional African American values of egalitarian gender roles in families, and of the higher values of family and community involvement (Allen and Conner 1997; Hunter and Davis 1992). Kelvin was a frustrated 29 year-old father in Chicago who had never held a full-time job. With four daughters and a wife,

he also never lived with his family. After enrolling in the fathering program, he returned to his wife's apartment and called a family meeting. He joked, "It was like a Brady Bunch thing…but we talked, and I told them that I started a program and that things were going to be different." Kelvin did not assume control over his relationships with his wife and children. Instead, he emphasized reciprocity, stressing "what I expected out of them, and what they could expect out of me…The program is about people who want to help themselves—I have to learn to crawl before I can walk."

Mo, a 25 year old father in the Indiana program, did not have many expectations when he enrolled in classes. "I remember a guy saying, 'Take time out for your kids.' And that night my son called, and I already had something lined up," he recalled. "I took the time out, and I been taking the time out. Through the week, [my son's] mother calls [to see if I want to see him], and I let other things slide so I can hang out with my children." Instead of waiting to secure a job in order to be a normative father, men found that the programs gave them a new vision of fatherhood. As Otis said, "This class is helping me to figure out how to get mine." Fatherhood, according to men in these programs, came with a measure of respect, social status, and a sense of purpose and belonging that they deserved. In this way, "getting mine" did not mean getting paid with finances for personal gain, but earning legitimacy and close relations with their children, which at times seemed impossible to secure. By working on relationships with their children first—and not setting out on a consuming job search immediately—fathers gained control and a renewed respect as they made progress towards becoming successful and engaged parents.

Program Interventions with Social Institutions

Outside of classroom sessions at the RF program sites, staff promoted a different notion of successful fatherhood as advocates in social institutions that reduced low-income African American men to stereotypes of deadbeat daddies or criminals. Men knew that it was easy to "slip back" into daddy status in courtrooms, employers' interviews, and caseworkers' offices in foster care and child support systems. Acting as advocates for participants, program staff struggled to convey a different set of expectations for successful fatherhood that gave priority to time and interaction, not money. As one program director said, "Good fathers should give whatever they can to their kids. These men don't have money, but they do have plenty of time on their hands. We emphasize that with the men, and when we meet with folks downtown who process them through the systems."

By actively pushing his case through court, Gil hoped to give the impression that he was a committed father who wanted to be involved in his child's life. Instead, he was shocked that the courtroom atmosphere equated him with "just another deadbeat daddy." He turned to program staff for support and guidance.

> I was upset in the courts after how they treated me. I'm the one taking the woman to court, but they treated me like I was the criminal. I didn't like it at all, and the guys in the program said "Don't worry about it, we'll take care of you, help you through it." I felt like I was violated. Don't look at her, look at me, don't look at her problems, look at my problems and what I'm trying to do. I'm expecting to be able to see my daughter every other weekend. I got a brick thrown in my face: my ex-girlfriend didn't want me to see my child without supervised visits. I never had supervised visits with my child—why do I need it now? I blew up. But the guys

told the judge that we'd use the program as a meeting place, a neutral zone. Come to find out that my ex didn't care if I saw the child or not—it was all to get back at me about how our relationship ended.

Isaiah was a 40 year old father with two preschool age daughters. The judge who referred him to the program reported that both mothers of his daughters had relinquished custody and were coping with substance abuse. With a stable job and residence, Isaiah believed that he was a viable alternative for custody, although, as mentioned above, he struggled with his past criminal record and stereotypes of being an unfit parent. He also turned to RF program staff to represent him as a successful parent.

People be calling us deadbeat dads, but I never seen a deadbeat volunteer for anything. Nobody is twisting our arms here. When some of the guys from the program told me that I could have custody of one of my kids, I almost laughed at them. I actually didn't know that there were so many people going through what I was going through. I used to sit back and say, man, how in the hell can men even have a chance in court.

Overall, RF programs were sites for low-income African American fathers to construct alternative understandings for masculinity. In contrast to the isolation that men often felt in their communities, the programs fostered a sense of social support and conducted interventions to prevent social institutions from reducing participants to "deadbeat dads." Program staff also facilitated personal transitions from past missteps and encouraged men to accept responsibility by spending more time nurturing relationships with children. The key to a new approach to masculinity in these programs was deemphasizing the provider role, and emphasizing instead the emergence of an embedded family role as male caregiver that was to be the core of an identity as a father—and a man.

Discussion

One father from the Illinois program, Otis, became a parent twice before he began to understand what was required of a daddy, and what was required of a father. As a participant in a responsible fatherhood program, he distinguished between minimal expectations (that of "daddies") and expectations for respected and valued contributions (made by "fathers"). The RF programs in Illinois and Indiana were viewed by participants as catalysts for alternative masculinities for low-income African American fathers.

Hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) suggests a way to understand the complex social interdependence of diverse groups of men, across race and class boundaries. In particular, personal choices or role transitions among privileged men may have implications for role transitions and personal choices for marginalized men (Burton and Snyder 1998). However, Connell's theory has been criticized for presenting a set of normative gender practices that are too simplistic and unitary. For example, Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue that a specific "masculinity" is not a "type of man" but a way that men position themselves through discourse. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledge that life history studies indicate that masculinities are fluid and dynamic, as they unfold and change over time.

In this study, we complicate understanding of hegemonic masculinity by detailing a process by which men crafted a new set of masculinity practices. Low-income African American fathers in this study still aspired to self sufficiency and control over their daily lives, goals which were attainable for men with resources. This finding supported Harris et al's assertion (1994) that young Black fathers hold normative values regarding the importance of providing (also found in Young 2006). This study builds on previous research that has depicted a range of street and protest masculinities (Bourgois 1991; Cooper 2000; Duneier 1992; Mac An Ghaill 1994; Morrell 2001; Staples 1982; Weis 2004). Hegemonic masculinity encourages men to accept the provider role in legitimate contexts, as full-time workers in established wage labor markets. Men with street masculinities often minimized expectations for fulfilling normative fathering roles, focusing on preservation of self and personal well-being.

In effect, the alternative masculinities created by fathers in this study could be integrated with the emergent "new fatherhood" of middle class fathers (see Fig. 1). Similar to Hamer (2001), we found that low-income African American fathers opened up alternative masculinities to challenge the primacy of providing as a basis for "good fatherhood," and in doing so, acknowledged structural inequalities that may keep poor men of color from becoming valued parents in families. Such alternative perspectives on masculinities may emerge alongside the efforts of many minority families to create flexible roles for men who can serve as social fathers without biological ties (Jarrett et al. 2002), or to borrow from available models to create new models for fatherhood (also found in Waller 2002). There was not a single paradigm for protest masculinity among African American men. Conceptualizations of manhood "flow back and forth from margin to center, providing men with varied tools and avenues to define themselves and negotiate manhood" (Hunter and Davis 1992, p. 475), both within and beyond traditional notions of masculinity, toward alternative versions of male roles.

Moreover, in the context of poor neighborhoods, men aspired to alternative valuations of masculinity that were nurtured and secured through supportive local institutions. New theoretical frameworks that situate fathering (Marsiglio et al. 2005) suggest that we attend to individuals as well as to communities and institutions when we examine how power is shaped and reshaped in gendered settings (Smith 1987). As men worked within programs to break with past missteps and commit to new life directions, different understandings of one's role as a father emerged (see also Laub and Sampson 2004). Peer and staff support for creating alternative masculinities offers evidence of the strength of embedded social networks and bonds of reciprocity in disadvantaged fathers' lives (see also Hamer 2001; Waller 2002).

Prior program evaluation of early RF programs suggests that programs can help men to redefine manhood (Bloom and Sherwood 1994). Did these programs promote specific versions of masculinity? Both programs explicitly encouraged participants to "drop the hostility and negativity" by moving away from street masculinities that minimize father expectations. However, they did not explicitly promote hegemonic masculine values. The programs adopted a two-track curriculum, to support men's efforts to find jobs and be providers, but to give priority to men's interaction with their children. This modified set of father expectations inverted the priorities for normative fathering.

There are limits to what RF programs can do to promote alternative Black masculinities. In some ways, RF programs filled the place of men's extended families. However, they are not successful engines for job development for low-income men. Local political economies must be transformed if poor Black men are to attain status as providers, or even as consistent contributors to their children's well-being. These programs walked a fine line, striving to meet the outcome

goals of public funders (increased rates of child support and paternity establishment) while at the same time working with men "where they really are" (Haney and March 2003). To the extent that family and community ideals for responsible fathering are in line with government mandates, programs can encourage men to spend more time with their children, and to establish paternity and pay support at a later point. However, given the scope and depth of challenges, poor Black men move in fits and starts on paths to successful fatherhood.

Findings from this qualitative study were uniquely tailored to the experiences of 75 low-income African American men in two different communities. As Daly (2007) asserts, the goal of grounded theory research is the development of theoretical or conceptual frameworks. Toward this end, we detailed the processes of how programs can help to shape new masculinities in challenging environments. These findings may be transferable (Lincoln and Guba 1985), in that they can be compared with findings from studies of masculinities in other social contexts. For example, are these processes typical of other RF programs across the United States? Evaluations of programmatic attempts to reshape paradigms for masculinity would be informative. Would other men, who were not eligible, dropped out, or did not agree to participate, shape alternative masculinities in similar ways? Finally, how would mothers' perspectives on construction of alternative masculinities differ—or support—men's reports?

Future research on masculinities and fathering can take a few interesting directions. First, understanding the relationship between variations in men's ages and how men construct viable masculinities requires more systematic treatment. There may be a developmental window, before about the age of 30, until which young African American men must maintain aspects of street masculinities for protection in dangerous environments. How does aging out occur, and what does this mean for how fathers think of themselves as men? Second, Connell's framework has important implications for how promotion of paternal involvement may impact the lives of low-income mothers. Do RF programs subordinate mothers' rights in their advocacy for low-income fathers? How can these programs support men's involvement and not introduce adverse influences into children's and women's lives? Finally, these community-based programs are just one example of how policies shape masculinities of marginalized men. Future research can explore the effects of correctional facilities, child support policies, paternal leave policies, and even temporary worker programs (similar to bracero programs) in recent policy debates around immigration and family life.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Responsible fatherhood programs are controversial among advocacy groups and policymakers (Curran and Abrams 2000). Some advocates argue that these programs intend to collect money from poor fathers to reimburse state funding of welfare reform. These programs may also take away critical resources from poor mothers who shoulder most of the burden of raising children. However, they may also become venues of assistance to men who are motivated to be parents, but unable to do so for lack of resources and support (Gerson 1997).

Programs that focus on connectedness and recognition of multiple realities (Bond 1999) may encourage alternative versions of masculinity that are not based on priority of fathers' financial provision. In particular, community-based programs are less likely to dismiss men who want to become involved with their children but who have been involved in gangs and other underground or illegal activities. RF staff members can utilize peer support models to promote

discussion and the growth of social support. RF programs offer cultural solutions to promote both resistance and creation of new opportunities for healthy expressions of masculinities.

They may also make inroads in addressing the inequality of life chances that is evident for men in disadvantaged communities. With adequate funding, these programs could prove to be key negotiators of barriers to work (Johnson et al. 1999) and distributors of resources (job contacts, educational information, even clothing, housing, and transportation) to men and disadvantaged families (similar to the New Hope welfare to work project with women and disadvantaged families; Yoshikawa et al. 2006). Although limited in scope, program intervention and advocacy in courts and policy systems may take a holistic family approach to supporting both poor African American fathers and mothers in their parenting. Staff can provide neutral sites and child-based activities for father/child interaction. They can also extend wrap-around services to address accumulated risks for extended families. Finally, through supportive group sessions, discussion of healthy sexual behavior, and resource-seeking activities, RF programs can sustain low-income African American men's mental and physical health in at-risk communities (Lee and Owens 2002). More support for active fathering may lead to reduction in stress and depression among men, and perhaps lower rates of domestic violence and conflict. Ultimately, such programs may prove to be important tools in crafting new visions of how to become successful adult men in the face of unpredictable and risky local communities and long-standing social stigmas due to race and class.

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