

Starting The Conversation

Common Themes Typifying Expectant
Unmarried Black Parents' Discussions about
Coparenting a First Child Together.

Research Team



Katherine McKay, Ph.D

- Dr. McKay received her Master's Degree in Clinical and School Psychology and her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Adelphi University in New York.
- She has over 20 years of experience providing psychological services to individuals and groups.
- Dr. McKay is a licensed psychologist in both New York and Florida and has provided psychotherapy to a diverse population in both states.

Research Team (cont'd.)



Vikki Gaskin-Butler, PhD

- Dr. Gaskin-Butler earned her Ph.D. in clinical and health psychology from the University of Florida and completed her pre-doctoral internship at the University of South Florida Counseling Center for Human Development.
- Dr. Gaskin-Butler also earned a Master's of Divinity from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.
- Dr. Gaskin-Butler joined the faculty in the Clinical Ph.D. program as a visiting clinical associate professor and Director of the Psychology Clinic in Fall 2019.
- Prior to joining the Clinical faculty, she was a faculty member in the Counselor Education and School Psychology Department at UCF. Dr. Gaskin-Butler served as a faculty member at USF St. Petersburg for 12 years before coming to UCF in Fall 2018. Dr. Gaskin-Butler also served as USF St. Petersburg's first Chief Diversity Officer.

Research Team (cont'd.)



Tara Little, M.A.

- Research & Grant Coordinator at Texas School Safety Center

Research Team (cont'd.)



James P. McHale, Ph.D

- Ph.D., Clinical Psychology, University of California, Berkeley
- Dr. McHale is a Professor of Psychology, Director of the USF Family Study Center on the St. Petersburg campus, and Executive Director for the Family Study Center's Infant-Family Center.
- He was previously Founding Chair of the USF St. Petersburg Department of Psychology, a position he held for 7 years. James has published over 100 articles and manuscripts on coparenting in diverse family systems, the central focus of the Family Study Center's work.
- His research studies have been supported since 1996 by the National Institutes of Health and numerous other entities.

USF - Family Study Center

- University of South Florida – St. Pete
- Family Study Center
- Dr. James P. McHale, PhD
- South St. Petersburg, FL
- 2010 – 2013
- “Figuring It Out for the Child” (FIOC)
- The Family Study Center on the USF St. Petersburg campus is the home of both basic and applied research studies concerned with understanding, supporting, and advocating for families with young children. Since its inception, the Family Study Center has been a base for innovative new projects and initiatives to support co-parenting and young children’s development.

Purpose of Presentation

- Identify common themes about impending coparenthood common among prenatal dyadic conversations shared between unmarried parents.



Families

— **20** Black fathers-to-be and **20** Black Mothers-to-be expecting a first child together

AGE	14 - 40
INCOME	200% below poverty level
Father Involvement	65% of moms & 45% of dads
Romantic relationship length	6 mos. – 15 years
Coresiding	11 couples
1 st Child Together	100% (5 moms and 4 dads had prior children)

Figuring it Out for the Child

- FIOC facilitator manual – contemplation and discussion:
- status of Black children in the community, parenting experienced in the family of origin, communication impasses, developing a shared parenting plan
- vetted by Black lay and pastoral counselors, seasoned activists, community organizers and community leaders who are all residents of South St. Pete.
- prior research has shown to be universally strong for both male and female users

Procedure

- Purposive sampling:
- Community Embedded Faith Based Organizations
- Prenatal Programs (Healthy Families & Healthy Start)
- Eligibility: unmarried, Black parents, first child together, no known active intimate partner violence that could threaten safety of the fetus, baby's due date should be at least 1 month away.
- Outreach

Six Session Discussion Topics

- 1) Sit-Rep
- 2) The Importance of Parents
- 3) Coparenting and Legacies
- 4) Keeping it Real
- 5) Getting Along
- 6) The Vision

Mentors

- Assigned at first session
- Guiding discussion
- Black male and Black female paraprofessionals
- Supervised by Licensed Black doctoral level psychologists

Data Gathering

- \$50 GC for completion of final session
- 60-minute sessions
- Semi structured meetings
- All six sessions were audio and video taped
- Transcribed verbatim
- Coded transcripts

Analyses

- Qualitative
- Grounded Theory (Glass & Strauss, 1967)
- Independently read transcripts
- Discovered patterns of themes
- Proposed a systematic initial set of codes
- Comparative Analyses

Method

- Stage 1
- Thirteen initially identified themes
- (a) anticipated involvement of blood and/or fictive kin with the baby, (b) anticipated levels of grand-maternal involvement and potential for grandmaternal interference, (c) roles of the parents' friends and running mates, (d) presence of other children from prior unions, (e) presence of adults from prior romantic relationships; (f) mother father communication, (g) amount of time spent together, (h) notions about marriage, (i) father's financial contribution, (j) court-ordered child support, (k) other financial issues, (l) negative and positive father legacies, (m) handling differences in parenting ideologies, including discipline.

Method (Cont'd.)

- Stage 2

Systematically coded all transcripts

Theory and data inform one another (Berg, 2001)

Changes to coding system throughout

All raters eventually agreed on a single set of codes

Method (Cont'd.)

- Stage 3
- Various subthemes into five superordinate themes
- Steered by mother-father co-creation of coparenting alliance

Results

Five Common Overarching Themes

- 1) Establishing the baby's family system
- 2) Supports and Threats to coparenting efforts
- 3) Reflecting on Fatherhood
- 4) Handling Parenting Differences
- 5) Effects of relationship status

Theme 1

- Establishing the Unique Identity of our baby's family system
- Parents' roles and responsibilities
- Others who would help support raising the child
- Maternal restriction of fathers' access to child ("gatekeeping")

Theme 2

- Supports and Threats to Coparenting Efforts
- Friends and Family
- Coparenting children from earlier relationships
- Paramours from prior or future romantic relationships

Theme 3

- Reflecting on Fatherhood: Connecting Past with Future Father Legacies
- Father identity transformation
- Origin family father legacies

Theme 4

- Acculturating and Parenting the Child: Child-Rearing Values and Differences
- Conversations about discipline
- Communicating about communication
- Offering each other support
- Carrying on religious family traditions

Theme 5

- Effects of the Couple Relationships on Coparenting
- Time together
- Sentiments about eventual marriage

Discussion

- Prior research about individually parenting
- Non-residential fathers *are* committed
- Review of five cross-cutting themes
- Expand on common themes
- Agreements and Disagreements across themes

Implications

- Coparenting in various families
- Triangular Dynamics
- Rapport Development
- Mentor Importance
- Recognizing the shared desire of mothers and fathers to “Figure it Out for the Child”
- Asking questions that presume a presence of present and future coparenting alliance

Conclusion

- Engagement of unmarried Black parents
- Reflective and intent parents
- Co-construction of family themes can begin
- Creating and protecting a relationship focused on child
- Commitment of Black fathers and mothers
- A new strength-based conversations about families eagerly await

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