

**A Harm Reduction Approach to Reduce the Adverse Social Impacts of Nonresident Status  
on Black Fathers and Their Biological Children**

by

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**Abstract**

Academic decline, disruptive behaviors, emotional distress, addiction, and early sex initiation are all public health issues highly affecting Black youth today. Parenting research states there is a correlation between these outcomes, effective parenting styles, family structure, and race. Past maternal and co-parenting research overlooks and under-studies Black fathers with little consideration to resident status and related youth outcomes. The nonresidential status of Black fathers perpetuated by existing public health issues of structural racism and targeted criminalization are compounded with societal stereotypes and demographic biases. Black fathers have lacked effective parenting skills for generations and over time, have lost access and opportunities to employment and resources to fulfill the parental role due to determinants like urbanization. This essay proposes integrating theoretical frameworks and attending to social and structural inequities to promote nonresidential Black fathers' effective parenting skills, bolster their supports, and expand available resources to improve the thriving of Black families.

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## Preface

I am a 40-year-old, Black, cis-gender woman whose identity intersects as a welfare and low-income housing recipient. These benefits have allowed me to thrive in my other role as a proud single parent of two boys, 16 and 14. My interest in this work stems from many lived experiences in the roles I mentioned. I have never received court-ordered child support. However, my sons' father and I have created our own systems to produce positive social, behavioral, and academic outcomes in our children. Which have worked thus far.

At 24 in 2007, after having my first son, I was introduced to single parenting due to the father's incarceration. I signed up for every assistance program I could but was soon given the ultimatum of suing my child's father for support or risk being dropped from certain benefits that, at that point, sustained me and the child's daily life. I refused because I understood their father's circumstances. I knew he was not able to provide any type of support - emotional, physical, and especially not financial. After his release in 2009, we brought a second child into this world.

We agreed early on that we would not reside with each other due to his being an out-of-state resident and my wanting to be close to family here in Allegheny County. However, neither his nonresidential status nor I have ever kept him from engaging with his children. He has been a disciplinarian, a confidant, an example, and a main pillar in the boys' upbringing. Now, both of us have had financial issues, and during those times, yes, I would lean on programs and systems for the deficiencies in support. However, I have had to not include their father and not mention his assistance or participation in their lives to receive certain help. This has caused strains on our communication and co-parenting over the years. However, there were no options that would

mediate with us without a formal child support order in place. Moving towards the end, I can say we have managed to raise our children successfully through trial and error.

I have watched family and friends who identify as Black cis-gender males attempt to navigate nonresidential parenting and the processes put in place by Family Division and have viewed the adverse outcomes exhibited by their children and the disadvantageous position it has placed on them. All these experiences have led to this proposal, which is intended to address the barriers, multi-generational effects, and adverse outcomes displayed by children who have a Black nonresidential father as a parent or the lack thereof. The lack of research into this population has led to exclusive services and biased programs that lend help only to mothers or other relatives in children's lives. From my experience, the current systems compound these issues by not fostering parental relationships and not providing tailored support to these men.



## 1. Introduction

Many studies and programs have explored co-parenting and the range of impacts it can have on child outcomes (Julion et al., 2012). Past research identified the importance of parenting practices and positive family interaction, stating they could account for 30-40 percent of adverse social outcomes exhibited in children (Patterson et al., 1989). Prior research and interventions involving Black parents typically look at the maternal relationship due to lack of access and biases towards the fathers' parental relevance (Julion et al., 2012). The addition of residing outside the home compounds the difficulties a Black father must overcome to establish their role as a parental asset (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

This has left gaps in research and minimized the creation of positive paternal-focused interventions that could enhance the relationships between Black nonresidential fathers and their children. The need for Black "father-centric" research, especially regarding residential status and quality versus quantity of time spent, is evident because the current and past research do not consider the unique factors that impede Black nonresident father relationships with their children, which can differ from nonresident fathers of other races, backgrounds, and social context (Doherty et al., 1998). Black nonresident fathers' perspectives are rarely considered. "Thus, involving Black nonresident fathers in family interventions aimed to prevent substance use and other unfavorable youth outcomes may be unique and beneficial" (Caldwell et al., 2004, pg. 647).

The Public Health Critical Race Praxis (PHCRP) is used as a means for understanding and explaining the intersection between race, structural racism, power in policy, and the structure and functioning of Black families, fatherhood, and residential status, both past and present (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010b). With the Critical Race Theory as a foundation, in advance, it argues and

magnifies the multitude of contextual factors - economic, social, and political, in nature—that have and will continue to contribute to the exponential increases in Black nonresident fathers in the Black community (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

A significant goal of this essay is to scrutinize the social, political, and economic factors that have worked to undermine Black fatherhood involvement and Black family formation over time (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019) so that future endeavors can be tailored to meet the needs of Black nonresidential fathers and their distinctive family structures. This essay does not capture the entirety of the mentioned theories or frameworks as it illustrates how existing theories and emerging frameworks can be used to navigate complex research issues within marginalized groups such as Black nonresidential fathers while informing future research.

### **1.1. Public Health Significance of Nonresident Status for Black Fathers**

Specific determinants of health that foretell the likelihood of a Black man living apart from his biological children are age, race, education, marital status, and income level (Livingston & Parker, 2020). Many of these factors are amplified by the criminalization and negative stereotypes attached to the status of being a Black nonresident father. Another significant hurdle to the involvement of Black nonresident fathers and their children is the interpersonal relationship between the parents (Amato & Rivera, 1999). Society portrays Black nonresident fathers as unconcerned about and nonessential to the upbringing of their offspring without acknowledging the multitude of psychological, contextual, and societal barriers that are associated with the degree of confidence, accessible resources, and motivation a Black nonresident father has in building a positive relationship with his child and/or their mother (Julion et al., 2012). No data source could

be found documenting the exact number of Black nonresident fathers in Allegheny County. For the background, national and state level data were examined.

The Pew Research Center analyzed the Current Population Survey and the 1960 Census of Population and demonstrated that in 1960, 11 percent of United States (U.S.) children had a nonresidential father. This number increased to 27 percent by the year 2010 (the data does not account for racial differences) (Livingston & Parker, 2020). Increasing divorce rates, multi-partner fertility, and premarital births amplify the status of Black fathers as nonresident across Black households (Livingston & Parker, 2020).

The unfavorable impacts of nonresident status on Black fathers can be observed psychologically through their conscious levels of parental involvement and parental self-efficacy. Education and marital status work in tandem because the lower the education level, the lower the probability the Black man is to be married to their child's mother, which increases the rate of Black fathers who become nonresidential (Livingston & Parker, 2020). Pre-existing financial instability can be amplified by factors like age, lack of education, legal sanctions, and incarceration, just to name a few. For Black nonresidential fathers, their physical presence and imposed child support orders can be correlated with their personal perspectives on their parenting capacity (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

In both male and female adolescent children of Black nonresident fathers, public health impacts have been documented as internalized and externalized health behaviors ranging from depression and academic decline to acts of violence and early sex initiation (Caldwell et al., 2004). However, Black youth, no matter what gender, need to be raised in a manner that teaches them positive personal and racial identity in a society that already devalues their existence due to race while maneuvering the overall societal disparities that devastate the Black community every day

(Caldwell et al., 2004). Constant exposure to racial inequities and discrimination negatively affects Black adults physically and psychologically (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023), which also takes a toll on their offspring (Trent et al., 2019), leading to the need for positive coping skills and qualified adults to emulate (Mitchell et al., 2009).

## **1.2. Overview of Essay**

The essay begins with defining “traditional” and “contemporary” family dynamics and how the nonresidential status has been exacerbated across Black households. In section two, the work will explore certain demographics and contextual factors that can predict nonresidential status in Black fathers. This will be followed by an explanation of how criminalization of drug laws and child support rapidly increased the incarceration and social stereotypes of Black nonresidential fathers that further perpetuated absenteeism. This section of the essay will conclude by identifying the relationships between adverse social outcomes like; academic decline, acts of violence and early sex initiation and effective parenting skills that can be used as protective factors, but that most nonresidential Black father lack knowledge and practice in. In section three of the essay, a literature review will examine evidence-based parenting programs to note available resources or the lack thereof. This will be followed by a review of the gaps in research with Black nonresidential fathers.

Section four of the essay will suggest, define, and explore the theoretical frameworks discussed previously as options to further research and interventions with Black nonresidential fathers and the triadic family structures they belong to. The discussion in section five synthesizes the entire essay and will speak to limitations when working with Black nonresidential fathers and

their unique family dynamics. The essay concludes with section six, which reiterates the issue, opportunities for future work, and, lastly, requests action towards agency for this demographic so that the pernicious impacts of nonresidential status on Black fathers will no longer be an instigator of academic decline, acts of violence and early sex initiation in their biological children's development.

## **2. Black Nonresident Fathers: Review of the Literature**

### **2.1. Family Dynamics**

#### **2.1.1. Nuclear Family Home**

The CDC states that family types are based on marriage status and who resides with the children (Ng et al., 2022). The nuclear family was the term coined in the 1920s by Bronislaw Malinowski, which defined the family structure of parents and their biological children. The word “nuclear” was used as a descriptor to further the word “family”. In this definition, the word “nuclear” is using the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, meaning to be a “basic or essential part” of something and, in this instance, a “family” (Merriam-Webster, 2023).

Since the 1950s, different people and groups have debated the change in nuclear families. Some entities state there has been a decline while others deny these claims by stating, “family structures are just changing” (Popenoe, 1993). However, the evidence shows it depends on what factors are being measured, how the “family” is being defined, and what race they are. The term “family” has accumulated many meanings dependent on the context in which it is being used. Traditionally, “family” was defined as a heterosexual couple with child(ren), typically upholding gender roles where the mother was the caregiver, and the father was the provider (Popenoe, 1993).

Political definitions of “family” are significant because they can determine a families’ eligibility for benefits, access to resources, and affect legislation. Resources, past and present, such as The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Basic program and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant Program, were established through various

governmental agencies with the intent of financially assisting disadvantaged families of all races (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Over time, these programs have implemented eligibility criteria that base their standards on the deprivation of parental support (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Welfare benefit levels were calculated using the Basic Family Unit (BFU). This has been legally defined as the available resources a mother and her dependent children have (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Benefit approval also accounts for the absence, incarceration, and lack of resources the nonresidential parent provides. In most cases, the nonresidential parent is the father and Black, which can further impair essential Black family formation (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

The Pew Center Study indicates that about 17 percent of biological fathers have fathered children with more than one woman (Livingston & Parker, 2020). With these new relationships come new and increased responsibilities, which, in turn, can cause lower amounts of willingness, time, financial assistance, and/or available resources to be rationed to each nonresidential child (Poole et al., 2015). Cohabitation between unmarried individuals with children has increased the number of nonresidential Black fathers. Today, 50 percent of marriages are preceded by cohabitation compared to the 8 percent recorded in the late 1960s. The increase in cohabitation occurred as marriage and divorce rates were declining (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). However, cohabitation has been shown to lessen the longevity of these relationships and can increase the risk of divorce. Marriage postponement is another result of cohabitation, which in the event of separation is another contextual factor that can lead to multi-partnered fertility, which can result in increased rates of nonresidential status in Black fathers (Popenoe, 1993). A Black nonresidential father must stretch his available resources across several households of their biological children when multi-partner fertility occurs (Livingston & Parker, 2020).

### **2.1.2. Single – Parent Home**

In contrast, a single-parent home is defined as a “household headed by someone who is unmarried, widowed, or divorced and not remarried.” This role can be held by a mother, a father, a grandparent, an aunt, or an uncle (Psychology Today, 2023). The U.S. Census reports that roughly 22 million children (about the population of New York) live with a single parent. Single parent households are 75 percent more likely to be headed by a woman versus a man (Livingston & Parker, 2020).

According to the Data USA, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania website, an estimated 156K Black or African American residents live in Allegheny County (Data USA, 2023), which has a total population of 1,225,360 (about the population of New Hampshire), showing that Blacks are only 13 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Women make up 52 percent of the total population (Homefacts, 2023), which is comparable to the national average; however, 72 percent of households in poverty in Allegheny County are headed by single mothers, even though they make up only 28 percent of all families with children in the county (The Pittsburgh Foundation, 2023).

### **2.1.3. Black Nonresidential Fathers**

The ideologies behind racial groupings were established by Carolus Linnaeus in 1735. His classifications became the basis for many racial policies. Early Black research was shaped by many “scientific” assertions founded on those racialized policies. Since early science was mostly quantitative, racial biases and influences were overlooked (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). Due to the exclusion of Black scientist rebuttals, these standards were held true and fair, allowing for



uneducated, unethical, and inequitable research to occur. Valid research began to surface in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, that led to the development of frameworks like the Critical Race Theory (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a).

Through the late 1960s, the nuclear family was a structure most Black families upheld along with the ideal of marriage (The Haworth Press, Inc., 2007). At this time, divorce from a nuclear family was the main reason residential status would change for a man (Poole et al., 2016). Today's complex family structures, multi-partnered fertility, and other determinants such as race, age, education, marital status, and income can also perpetuate this status change, not to mention the systematic racism endorsed by criminalization and deleterious stereotypes. As mentioned, the increase in premarital births and premarital cohabitation have been known to bolster the nonresidential status of Black fathers (Livingston & Parker, 2020) especially within young Black underprivileged couples (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). When analyzing social, economic, and political disparities that specifically impact Black nonresidential fathers, unemployment (deindustrialization), the "war on drugs", mass incarceration, and welfare reform can be directly related to their parenting skills, parental efficacy, and parental-motivation (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

Black nonresidential fathers are far less likely than their white counterparts to be married to the mother of their children (Livingston & Parker, 2020). Currently, one-in-four fathers live apart from their children, with 63 percent of most fathers claiming the paternal role is much harder to fulfill today than it was in past generations (Livingston & Parker, 2020). The Pew Center Research Study also found that nearly half (46%) of all fathers communicate having at least one child out-of-wedlock, with 17 percent of men claiming to have children with women across several households (Livingston & Parker, 2020). In this work, a Black nonresidential father can be defined

as an African American, cis gender male who resides outside the home of his biological children. These individuals are also called non-custodial because they do not have legal or physical custody of their children, regardless of their residential status. Many fatherhood initiatives have begun using only the term “nonresidential” so that it is not implied that children are objects to be owned (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, 2023).

## **2.2. Demographics**

### **2.2.1. Age**

Age is another factor that can determine the likelihood of a Black father being nonresidential (Doherty et al., 1998). When teenagers become parents, their age can create barriers to fulfilling parental roles. Qualitative data shows that in most instances, the maternal grandparents tend to become “gatekeepers,” making decisions on how the parents engage and care for the child(ren). Most scenarios end in court-ordered child support, disputes for paternity and sometimes the forfeiting of parental rights (Doherty et al., 1998) before the young men understand their rights. Fathers aged 20-24 (approx. 26%) are less likely than older fathers to be married to the mother of their children, with this number increasing to 47 percent for those aged 25-29. For these same age groups, 53 percent and 62 percent, respectively, claim to still be in a relationship or cohabiting with the mother of their children. In comparison, 58 percent of fathers aged 40-44 are married to the mother of their children (Livingston & Parker, 2020).

With more equitable research occurring, more scholars began studying the Critical Race Theory, becoming known as Critical Race Theorists or self-proclaimed “crits” (experts on CRT)

(Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). These scholars have come up with concepts like “game changers” to identify and highlight the adaptability of racism (Alexander, 2012). The adaptability of racism is the idea that racism has not been eradicated but that racism has and will always adapt to the current times. This is supported by the recognition of modern forms of social control and slavery through factors like joblessness, lack of education, multi-generational poverty, and welfare reform (Alexander, 2012). Racial systems need to transform as they are contested to maintain the positionality of racial hierarchies and the prosperity of certain groups (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

### **2.2.2. Education / Employment**

Education level has been highly correlated with the likelihood of marriage between two individuals who conceive out-of-wedlock. Biological fathers with high levels of education have lower rates of premarital births than those with lower education levels. At least 83 percent of those with a bachelor’s degree are married to the mother of their child(ren). In comparison, 63 percent of those without a high school diploma are not married to the mother of their illegitimate offspring (Livingston & Parker, 2020). Less-educated Black men have high unemployment rates (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), with an overall 11.4 percent reporting joblessness (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

Black men are recorded to have the lowest participation in the work force compared to their male counterparts (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). In comparison to other racial identities, Black men with a bachelor’s degree or higher still carry the highest rates of unemployment across the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). At one point in time, Black men were a large part of the industrialized economy. However, with the increase of the service industry,

deindustrialization, low rates of educational attainment, and low economic stability, the Black man has become non-essential in the workforce and unable to provide in the household, leaving them displaced and discredited (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Consistent employment has been identified as a prerequisite and necessity for a stable, thriving marriage to occur from research with Black mothers. Unemployment and income imbalances can cause marital issues in any culture, but in the Black population, it can make a man unsuitable for marriage and/or cohabitation (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

### **2.2.3. Marital Status / Income**

A relationship between declines in marriage rates among Blacks has been identified with economic insecurity. Under many circumstances, chronic work instability contributes to low marriage rates among Black males, particularly young men, who tend to have higher rates of unemployment (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Over half (55%) of all men with biological children are married to the biological mother of their children, with an additional 7% of biological fathers claiming to only cohabit with the mother and child(ren) (Livingston & Parker, 2020).

Fathers with higher family incomes are much less likely to be living apart from any of their children than are those with lower incomes. Some 15 percent of fathers with annual family incomes of \$50,000 or more live apart from a child, compared with 39 percent of those with incomes below \$30,000 and 38 percent of those with incomes of \$30,000 to \$49,999 (Livingston & Parker, 2020). This supports findings that the higher a nonresidential Black father's annual income is, the greater the chances they will assist financially and increases the amount of engagement they will have with their biological child(ren) (Poole et al., 2016).

This trend is also noticed in nonresidential Black fathers of young children. Just five percent of fathers with family incomes of \$50,000 or more are living away from a child less than 5 years of age. In comparison, some 29 percent of dads with family incomes of less than \$30,000 live apart from a child, as do 24 percent of dads with incomes of \$30,000 to \$49,999. (Livingston & Parker, 2020).

### **2.3. Criminalization / Stereotypes**

In the 1980s, the U.S. Government executed the “War on Drugs” to combat crack cocaine and drug trafficking. At the same time, two-parent households began to decline, and single-mother households began to increase as high rates of crime, violence and homicide impacted Black communities (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). The abrupt and significant increase in drug activity in inner cities resulted in high addiction rates, lowered number of Black suitors for marriage, and a decline in effective parenting skills in Black households (Alexander, 2012). This was followed by a shift to punitive punishment by the Nixon and Reagan Administrations. Which was then compiled by the “zero tolerance policies” implemented by the Clinton Administration, which introduced the “three-strike laws and mandatory minimum sentencing.” The so-called “war” resulted in epidemic proportions of Black males being incarcerated (Alexander, 2012).

Studies have documented substantial racial disparities that persist in the incarceration system. A report by the Center for the Study of Social Policy documents the rise in the number of incarcerated Blacks in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1981, Whites (57%) outnumbered Blacks (42%) in the state and federal prison population. However, by 1986, the trend reversed, where 45 percent of Blacks and 40 percent of Whites made up the prison populace (Wadsworth Publishing Company,

1999). By 1991, this resulted in 49 percent of the prison population being Black, in comparison to 35 percent of the prison population being Caucasian (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). In 1997, six times more African Americans were incarcerated than Caucasians, and of them, one-third were Black males aged 20 – 29 (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). The U.S. penal system continues to operate under racial inequities, allowing for incarceration to have become normal in the lives of young, disadvantaged Black males, impacting employability, financial stability, and their role as a father regardless of residential status (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

The deliberate targeting of Black men and the intersectionality between race and U.S. drug enforcement laws is evident (Drug Policy Alliance, 2023). Black people comprise 13 percent of the U.S. population and engage in drug use at similar rates in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups. However, they represent 31 percent of those arrested for drug offenses and 40 percent of those incarcerated for such crimes (Drug Policy Alliance, 2023). Adverse social outcomes and disrupted relationships (familial, marital, and nonmarital) have been consequences of mass incarceration, making the nuclear family one of the penal system's largest social casualties for the Black population. Incarceration further limits access, resources, and parental supports between Black men and their offspring (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019).

This has led to the use of terms like disorganized, unstable, and dysfunctional to describe Black family structures (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Black men have been generalized through a process called “being niggered”, where their presence has been minimized to these assumptions of incompetency, troubledness, and incivility (Simmons, 2014).

## 2.4. Child and Adolescent Adverse Outcomes

Unhealthy family dynamics and unstable family structures have been linked to many adverse outcomes in youth of all races and can vary by gender. Trauma and stress developed in adolescence can manifest as behavioral, academic, and risky sexual behaviors (Caldwell et al., 2004). Research has identified harsh authoritative parenting styles to be accurate predictors for the mentioned adverse outcomes. Lack of effective parenting skills like positive engagement, good supervision, and consistent discipline can modify youth conduct, especially when the household lacks high levels of connectedness and communication (Barlow & Coren, 2017). Substance abuse and mental well-being in children are also influenced by family outcomes (Caldwell et al., 2004).

Poverty, socioeconomic status, and role conflicts within the parenting realms can indirectly affect mental well-being and behavioral outcomes in youth. Confrontational parental relationships can have negative effects on adolescents' self-esteem, personal identity, and aggression levels (Žukauskienė, 2014). Having a positive personal identity and a solid racial identity is important in the development of youth because it can assist with coping skills, emotional regulation, and healthier social functioning (Žukauskienė, 2014). Substance abuse in youth can be attributed to parents' addictions and personal struggles with alcohol more than family functioning (Caldwell et al., 2004), so further research is needed in this area of child development.

Academic decline, acts of violence, and unhealthy sexual behaviors have mixed reports on how they are affected by parenting styles, perceived parental involvement, and the residential status of biological fathers in Black families (Amato & Rivera, 1999). When having a nonresidential Black father, youth can develop emotions like resentment, sadness, anger, and envy when observing active or residential fathers engage with their children in their social environments such as schools, stores, and local parks (Simmons, 2014). Many adverse outcomes in youth can be

exacerbated when the biological father resides outside the home. This realm of parenting can become more complex with the addition of other factors like unemployment, age, multi-partner fertility, and incarceration (Simmons, 2014).

## **2.5. Protective Factors**

Emerging research shows that positive parenting practices implemented by fathers, regardless of residential status, are associated with better outcomes for children of any race or social background. Increased social outcomes have been observed in a range of domains, such as mental health, behavioral changes, academic adjustments, and cognitive development (Barlow & Coren, 2017). Fathers' positive involvement (e.g., supervision, discipline, support) has been identified as a protective factor for at-risk youth, showing decreases in depressive symptoms, aggression, and delinquency among youth (Doyle et al., 2013).

“Responsible Fathering” is a concept that has been generalized and simplistically defined as a man who actively and equally provides for his children and their basic needs, claims legal paternity, and /or postpones fatherhood until he can fulfill the role (Doherty et al., 1998). The issue with this framework is that the use of the word “responsible” implies that there is a “right or wrong” way to implement paternal parenting skills into a child’s life. However, the current processes do not account for the many contextual factors that are unique to a Black nonresidential father (Doherty et al., 1998). Concluding that when a Black father is labeled as nonresidential, this instantly enlists these men into the realm of “irresponsible fathering” as defined by societal rules, biases, and stereotypes (Doherty et al., 1998), starting the discrediting of the father as a relevant parental asset (Livingston & Parker, 2020).



Positive parental support that includes behaviors like responsiveness, trust, reinforcement, and allowing academic autonomy can lessen academic decline, increase personal efficacy (academically and personally), and enhance mental health (Doherty et al., 1998). Parental efficacy in fathers can vary based on individual contextual factors that may require more direct support and intense resources from person to person. According to Livingston and Parker, “Almost 9-in-10 (88%) Black fathers who live with their children rate themselves as doing a good or very good job, while just under half (49%) of nonresidential Black fathers evaluate themselves similarly (Livingston & Parker, 2020). This can affect the father’s motivation levels to provide or engage with their children.

Lots of research on co-parents, married couples, mothers, and white people has highlighted protective factors for fathering, leaving Black nonresidential fathers overlooked and understudied (Livingston & Parker, 2020). Stable family structures have beneficial effects on psychosocial adaptations, decision-making skills, and lessened adverse social outcomes (Žukauskienė, 2014). Black families have been known for their untraditional structures; however, they have been recognized for the unwavering resilience they display. This resilience has shown a positive correlation to advantageous development in youth observed through stable social relationships, enhanced emotional regulation, and elevated coping skills (Žukauskienė, 2014).

Increased parental involvement from Black fathers has been shown to lessen academic issues such as fighting, disruptive, and delinquent behaviors in school. When parental monitoring has been implemented, it has been shown to decrease alcohol abuse in young Black males. Better communication with Black fathers has been shown to subside unhealthy sexual behavior in Black youth regardless of gender (Caldwell et al., 2004). Many other parenting characteristics have been researched via maternal reports and proxies that do not fully capture the impact residence status

has on Black fatherhood or the essence of those relationships (Caldwell et al., 2004). However, here are a few of those beneficial parenting characteristics that have shown to be protective factors when it comes to adolescent well-being. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, as more “father-centric” research is needed within the Black community.

- Parent-child communication
- Parental norms, values, and agreements on behaviors
- Parental closeness / family connectedness
- Parental role modeling
- Racial identity (Caldwell et al., 2004)

There is a lack of evidence-based parenting programs for and with Black, nonresidential fathers. More research and methods are needed to fill this gap of knowledge to contextualize the advantages and challenges to the development and well-being of their biological children (Žukauskienė, 2014). The current body of evidence generated specifically for Black nonresidential fatherhood is so small that significant formative research is critical so that the existing stereotypes, biases, and ideologies behind Black fathering are not exacerbated (Doherty et al., 1998).

### 3. Review of Parenting Programs and Gaps in Research

#### 3.1. Parenting Programs

Effective parenting programs aim to strengthen families and enhance parental knowledge. Evidence-based parenting programs have scientific rigor that can improve the quality and amount of parental engagement, increase parental consistency, and develop better parenting skills (Small & Mather, 2009). The standard program will run for 8-12 weeks (about 3 months) and sessions typically last about 1-2 hours. When evidence-based programs are implemented, there is a reassurance that the program has been tested and evaluated in a manner that supports its efficacy with certain populations to impact specific factors (Small & Mather, 2009). In this work, 25 parenting programs were briefly reviewed from the *What Works – Evidence-Based Parenting Program Directory*. The programs were investigated for their relevance and intent in assisting Black nonresidential fathers and their unique fathering roles and the correlation to the adverse social outcomes displayed by their biological children (Small & Mather, 2009).

Four out of the twenty-five programs specifically targeted single-mother households; however, the other 21 programs state they service specific family structures that fall within certain eligibility criteria (e.g., at-risk, low-income). To be included in this directory, programs had to be enrolled in at least one national registry of evidence-based programs (Small & Mather, 2009). Not one of the included programs listed their target audience as fathers, meaning there was no mention of Black nonresidential fathers. However, the directory explicitly suggests that more research is required around fatherhood, especially in low-income, at-risk families (Small & Mather, 2009).

### 3.2. Gaps in Research

The past focus of paternal research has been on the amount of contact occurring between the nonresident father and their biological child, how to get fathers to comply with child support, and how to increase their earnings to provide more financial support (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Unlike single mothers who are documented through birth, school/medical, and public assistance records, nonresidential Black fathers are a difficult demographic to reach (Poole et al., 2016). This has enhanced the use of mothers as an unauthorized proxy to set forth standards and beliefs for paternal roles in parenting (Doherty et al., 1998). Single-mother perspectives have become the surrogate for rates of Black nonresidential fathering (Poole et al., 2016). Data supports the idea that any positive paternal involvement increases the chances of better childhood outcomes. The question has arisen as to whether negative outcomes are caused by the quantity of time the nonresident father spends with the child or by the quality of the time spent (Caldwell et al., 2004). Parenting from outside the home limits access when it comes to Black nonresident fathers seeing their child (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Most illegitimate children tend to live with the mother after birth. This typically leads to a stronger maternal bond, which needs to be considered in research as an external factor (Doherty et al., 1998).

Understanding of this will require more “father-centric” research with Black men that include contexts such as residential status, especially since most models of fatherhood have resident father templates (Poole et al., 2016), with considerations to how society and the definition of paternal parenting roles change over time and circumstances (Doherty et al., 1998). The evidence gap is exacerbated for the marginalized population of Black nonresident fathers who have had no proper representation in mainstream research. There are small bits of scientific evidence to support co-parenting from the father’s perspective, very little is known about Black coparenting

or Black fathering practices, therefore, leaving an obvious gap in research on coparenting with Black nonresidential fathers in the literature (Doyle et al., 2013).

## 4. Theoretical Frameworks

### 4.1. Public Health Critical Race Praxis (PHCRP)

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) is not like other theories, with its iterative methods. It is used to transform the current relationships between power, race, and racism. Originally, the Critical Race Theory was founded by a group of colored law students advocating against institutionalized racism based on their experiential knowledge in 1989 (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). CRT is grounded in social justice and has emerged as an interdisciplinary method based on key racial principles. These key principles include *race consciousness*, *contemporary mechanisms*, and *centering the margins*, which will be briefly explained later.

The main objective of the Critical Race Theory is to combat racism's adaptability (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). Since the structures and functionality of the Black family have been correlated to urbanization, employment, poverty, mass incarceration, and institutional racism, special considerations need to be made to account for historical context, economic, political, and social factors (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). The Critical Race Theory requires scholars and researchers to be conscientious of equity while conducting research, scholarship, and practice with marginalized populations (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). It has been suggested “that health for all cannot be achieved if structural racism persists.” The complete eradication of racism is a crucial element in executing the objectives of public health (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). The Critical Race Theory believes that racism has adapted over time and is a structural mechanism that has no boundaries. CRT states that contemporary racism operates through a lens of normalcy called “ordinariness” (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a).

Research has revealed that racial identity is important for Blacks in any age group and can be correlated with both positive and negative social outcomes (Carter, 2008). Race consciousness has been defined as “the explicit acknowledgment of the workings of race and racism in social contexts or in one’s personal life” (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). “Ordinariness” is defined as the daily exposure to various multifaceted forms of racism that Blacks have learned to ignore, oblivious to acknowledge, or misinterpret due to the high frequency in occurrences (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). Centering the margins through the Critical Race Theory is important for research so that the voices of marginalized groups are the highlighted starting point versus the conclusion when working around inequities (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a). By “centering the margins”, marginalized groups can feel empowered by sharing lived experiences, identifying issues important to them, and by becoming a change agent in their demographic and/or community. Until now, the Critical Race Theory has been the driving force behind research on racism (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a).

Recently, the Public Health Critical Race Praxis was developed for the field of Public Health. For reasons of health, research on disparities needs to be grounded in social justice and racial equity (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010b). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “praxis” is the practical application of a theory or applied knowledge (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023). The Public Health Critical Race Praxis is the application of the Critical Race Theory and its principles to reach conclusions that can assist in resolving health, housing, employment, and research inequities (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010a).

## 4.2. Resilience Theory

The Resilience Theory is a strength-based approach that can be used to create movement from risky health behaviors and adverse social outcomes to a place of purpose, confidence, and advantageous social skills (Zimmerman, 2013). Black families have always shown collective resilience, commitment to each other, and some extent of stability since slavery (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). Even though some would argue that resilience is an individual characteristic, many Black youth attribute their personal resilience to the support of family (Simmons, 2014). By collaborating with the familial triadic structure (father-child-mother) to better understand knowledge, beliefs, and social supports, more mechanisms to create resilience within the youth can be identified and replicated (Doherty et al., 1998). Simultaneously, considerations of the unique kinship networks established by Blacks must be investigated for their impacts on individual resiliency and as well (Simmons, 2014).

Using the Resilience Theory will allow researchers to investigate the adverse effects of nonresidential Black fathers on their biological child(ren) development to better understand why some youth grow up healthy and unaffected while others must navigate unique barriers and disadvantageous outcomes (Zimmerman, 2013). The Resilience Theory has several models it uses in research and program designs to identify assets and resources for better youth outcomes. All the strategies aim to study protective factors and behaviors that enhance youth development. Applying the Resilience Theory approach to this research will help increase its rigor and help build systems for future research, program design, and policy reform (Zimmerman, 2013).



### 4.3. Harm Reduction

Harm Reduction was designed to target populations of drug users to help them better manage their addictions with life. This approach uses a spectrum of strategies that address unique contextual factors along with the biases and social disadvantages attached to the status of being an addict (National Harm Reduction Coalition, 2023). Harm Reduction focuses on education, prevention, and control (Willians, 2023). Harm Reduction demands that interventions and policies be designed to serve those afflicted by addiction, with the intention of meeting the individual and community needs; however, there is no universal definition of or formula for implementing Harm Reduction at this time (National Harm Reduction Coalition, 2023).

Harm Reduction principles can be applied to the nonresident status on Black fathers in the same way it has been applied to substance abusers. The Harm Reduction principles include pragmatism, humanistic values, focusing on the “harms,” balancing the costs and benefits, and prioritizing immediate goals (Willians, 2023). Using this approach can help strengthen family relationships, introduce and increase the use of evidence-based protective factors, and reduce adverse social impacts such as early sex initiation, violent behaviors, substance abuse and academic decline in Black nonresidential fathers' children. Parenting programs that implement evidence-based practices can help Black nonresidential fathers transition from a “deficit-based” mindset to a “competency-based” model (Willians, 2023). Using iterative programming to combat this complex topic will allow participants to begin transitioning into effective parents while minimizing the adverse social impacts affecting their adolescent children’s well-being behaviorally, cognitively, and academically (Amato & Rivera, 1999).

## 5. Discussion

The implications that Black nonresident fathers' absences are vindicated by the financial support they provide has become less supported over time. This idea contradicts empirical data that supports the notion that positive paternal involvement (typically researched in two-parent households) contributes to the development, well-being, and attainment of children (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Contrary to societal beliefs, Black nonresident fathers initially want to engage with and parent their biological children, with over 80% being present at the time of birth or at least visiting the hospital before maternal discharge (Julion et al., 2012). As the child gets older and based on gender, the chances of the father leaving the home increase, especially in unmarried couples that reside together (Mitchell et al., 2009). Young Black men of the past were provided a blueprint for fatherhood when they observed the men around them working lucrative blue-collar jobs, because these men were respected as husbands, providers, and contributors to their communities.

With race, age and other demographics underscoring the plight of Black fathers (Lemmons & Johnson, 2019), structural racism has been able to discredit and disregard Black nonresidential fathers as pertinent participants in the upbringing of their child(ren). Knowing the parental needs of Black youth and the substantial number of them with a biological nonresident father, it is obvious that increasing effective parenting skills, access, and resources is a necessity. Fatherhood and paternal relevance have become an evolving construct since the definition of “responsible fathering” has not been solidified and changes based on political agendas. Not to mention, the expected fulfillment of the fathering role changed from decade to decade as society has set “mothering” as the benchmark for norms for “fathering” (Doherty et al., 1998).

The essay justifies why harm reduction and its tenets (education, prevention, and control) (Willians, 2023) can identify and address how the nonresident status of Black fathers exacerbates the adverse social outcomes exhibited by their biological children. By using evidence-based theoretical frameworks like the PHCRP, resilience theory, and the principles of “responsible fathering” (Doherty et al., 1998), participating fathers will be able to learn effective parenting skills, establish rapport with systems and resources previously untapped or underutilized. While learning how to spend quality time and what effective parenting is, Black nonresidential fathers will reestablish positive paternal roles with their biological children as a confident parental asset.

Today, young men have been left with a deficit in the number of productive males to emulate. Research needs to account for the uniqueness found in Black family structures because evidence shows that “family dynamics” in any race can affect the well-being and social outcomes of children. Further consideration needs to be given to residential status and multi-partner fertility when working with Black fathers, especially when executing court orders, determining custody and visitation rights, and during the provision of resources. Increased expenditure of finances, time, and other resources provided by active nonresidential Black fathers need to be sustained through external support developed, designed, and implemented specifically towards this demographic of fathers. Programs need to capture Black nonresidential fathers' experiential knowledge, perspectives, and suggestions directly. Since previous research has focused on the maternal views of parenting, the proposed program framework will attempt to place the understudied paternal experience at the forefront.

This essay has established a basic understanding as to why research conducted with nonresidential Black fathers is important and beneficial. However, there are limitations. Parenting research tends to investigate paternal roles in two dimensions (home and school), limiting the depth

of the data. Since a nonresidential Black father does not reside inside the child's residence, it is vital to capture the various modes of home involvement in all their multidimensionality. Making it important that nonresidential Black fathers have a safe and stable environment to visit and engage with their children. Another limitation to research with nonresidential Black fathers is the use of cross-sectional data, which collects observational data of many subjects but only at one time point, while more longitudinal data is required with this marginalized group. The advantages of cross-sectional studies are their affordability and their ability to be generalized. However, this lends to the issue at hand. To be scientifically beneficial, cross-sectional data needs to observe the entire population, which research has determined has not been easy or performed with nonresidential Black fathers. Also, research biases and investigator positionality can be highly influential in cross-sectional studies.

Multidisciplinary perspectives are needed to successfully conduct research within these unique family structures. Assessing observational reports and data solely from the father and child is pertinent to understanding their "connectedness," to evaluate parental efficacy, and to measure effective parenting skills. Research has no definitive understanding of emotional involvement, perceived parental efficacy, or the quality of engagement between nonresidential Black fathers and their children. Future investigations and programs need to consider parental relationships, the effects of mother-child rapport, and the residential status of the biological father, as these factors may complicate the family dynamic further. The goal is not to displace mothers or replace maternal benefits towards adolescent development but to enhance it with an effective, resourceful, paternal partnership regardless of residential status.

## 6. Conclusion

This proposed program framework can be used to further research to develop and implement programs working with Black nonresidential fathers attempting to lessen the adverse social outcomes exhibited by their biological offspring. While identifying the gaps in the literature and the range of statistics, research specifically accounting for Black nonresidential fathers and the inequities they encounter is scarce. However, the need for this type of research is acknowledged, supported, and properly documented in the limitation section throughout effective parenting literature. Research confirms that the relationships between Black nonresident fathers and their children are distinctive but should be further explored, and is vital to future generations, but acknowledges the current evidence and accessible sample size is limited (Amato & Rivera, 1999).

By using the Public Health Critical Race Praxis to guide effective parenting programs and research, researchers can ethically investigate the struggles between power, race, and racism that hinder Black nonresidential fathers from fulfilling their paternal roles and responsibilities. The findings should be submitted to appropriate journals. The qualitative data should be presented at conferences and shared with relevant stakeholders like the Department of Human Services and Family Division to acquire more funding for future research and programs with this population and their children. By including theoretical frameworks like PHCRP with its racially equitable findings and frameworks like PRISM/RE-AIM, implementation of developed programs can begin to recruit and reach this understudied population, collect representative data, and iteratively begin to tailor programs and resources to better support Black nonresidential fathers.

As a collective, society has created the nonresident father status, and the adaptability of racism has furthered its negative implications on Black men. As Black men enter fatherhood, many are excited for the journey, but many more are not able to provide adequate resources, time, or effective parenting skills. In a society that does not promote the postponement of fatherhood, that has embedded racial discrimination into the daily lives of Black people, there is no wonder the Black man has been placed at a financial, academic, and social disadvantage. More importantly, all Black people, in some way, have been desensitized to racism, regardless of parental or residential status. If Black nonresidential fathers are not further explored and understood the multigenerational impacts will continue to afflict Black youth through disruptive behaviors, early sex initiation and mental health symptoms. The data reflects where the gaps are and what voices need to be amplified. Now we must use the available theories and frameworks to scientifically undo the deleterious effect that nonresidential status has placed on Black fathers and begin to reverse the adverse social outcomes displayed by generations to come.

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