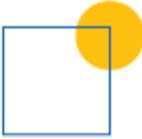




THE BLUEPRINT

Virtual Town Hall



Parenting and Relationships: It's All In The Family

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall

September 29, 2020

Transcript

Speaker: Dr. Armon Perry

Dr. Armon Perry ([00:17](#)):

I appreciate it the opportunity to connect to you all and engage you all in this discussion today. My name is Armon Perry. I'm a professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky, where I teach introduction to social work, as well as social work practice. My research revolves around issues connected to and related to fathers and more specifically African-American fathers and the ways in which systems and social service agencies shape their involvement with their children.

Dr. Armon Perry ([00:49](#)):

I also am the project director for the 4 Your Child project, which is a federally funded parent education intervention that engages non-resident fathers in a program that features 28 hours of parent education and solution-focused case management services. I'm here today to talk with you all about what I feel like in the literature bears out is a really, really important topic related to fatherhood, which is co-parenting.

Dr. Armon Perry ([01:15](#)):

Co-parenting has always been and continues to be one of, if not the strongest predictors of fathers' involvement with their children. That is certainly the case when it comes to African-American fathers and there are a number of reasons for that. Chief among them is that demographic transport to the fact that for all Americans, there is a departure from marriage. Fewer and fewer adults are opting to get married. We know that disproportionately even smaller numbers of African American adults are opting to get married. And if they do get married, they're getting married much later in life than in days gone by.

Dr. Armon Perry ([01:51](#)):

We also know that non-marital child bearing numbers are on the rise. And that is particularly the case with black families. And as a result of that, what that means is that there's even more of a premium placed on the role that dance played, because necessarily those dads are having to negotiate access to their children and create opportunities for their active involvement engagement in their kids' lives outside of a traditional two parent marital arrangement.



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Dr. Armon Perry ([02:24](#)):

And so again, for those demographic reasons, we know that there's a body of research that points to the fact that indeed is the case that even among non-resident fathers, African-American fathers tend to be the most involved in terms of nurturing caregiving behavior. Much of that is a function of getting some of those same demographic trends that point to the frequency and prevalence with which black men or African-American men find themselves in those types of family constellations. But it also speaks to the ways in which from a historical standpoint, African-American families have always been more egalitarian in terms of gender role, where women have always worked outside of the home. And we've also seen men active involved in nursing and caregiving behavior. And we see that continuum even in a contemporary context.

Dr. Armon Perry ([03:13](#)):

And so when we think about the issues related to co-parenting and how it is that those things shape and influence the extent to which make and maintain an active role in the children's lives, there are a number of different factors that I would like for us to spend some time thinking about. And obviously one of the primary issues there is the extent to which men are able to secure and maintain gainful employment.

Dr. Armon Perry ([03:41](#)):

Our research tells us that men who have access to economic resources, who have higher levels of educational attainment, these are men who face fewer barriers as it relates to their ongoing engagement with their children, largely because they will live to fulfill their socially prescribed roles as bread winners.

Dr. Armon Perry ([04:04](#)):

On the contrary, we also see where men who for whatever reason, find themselves in poverty or among the ranks of the socially and economically disadvantaged. We find that those men find sometimes great difficulty in maintaining and establishing their connections with their children, largely because, again, of the world around them tells them that job number one is as a breadwinner, as a financial provider. Sometimes the men absorbed those messages themselves and feel as though if they aren't able to fulfill that provider role, many of these men begin to believe or internalize the messages that they have no other contribution to make to their families.

Dr. Armon Perry ([04:50](#)):

One of the things I try to do in all of my work is to dispel that myth and share with guys the information has come out of a lot of the child development literature that speaks to the unique and irreplaceable role that fathers play in their children's lives, particularly as it relates to their unique ability to encourage and promote self-confidence through rough and tumble play and child development related activities, that dads are more likely to be involved in than say for instance, mothers.



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Dr. Armon Perry ([05:23](#)):

Those things have been connected to and linked to greater self-esteem in children and more of an interest in willingness to take calculated risks that leads to confidence if and when those types of decisions and behaviors are engaged in. So we know from the literature that dads play a unique and irreplaceable role in the lives of their children. We know that the world around us tells us that men's primary job is as financial providers and breadwinners. And again, certainly it's the case that dads should play that role. But one of the things that we're working to do is to broaden out the definition of what it means to be a good father. And for folks who find themselves in situations where they live apart from the children, that places a premium on the quality of the co-parenting relationship.

Dr. Armon Perry ([06:18](#)):

And so in the work that we've done with our 4 Your Child fatherhood project, we spent large amounts of time working with dads around improving their co-parenting skills, improving their communication skills, improving their conflict resolution skills, so they're in a much better position to be able to negotiate access to their children. So that they can apply whatever it is that they learn in our project. From that, we've also been able to secure small grants from the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network. And with that project, what we were able to do was engage the mothers with some of the dads in our fatherhood program. And we provided them with a couple of parent education workshops that essentially were attempts to bring them behind the scenes in terms of what it was we were teaching the dads.

Dr. Armon Perry ([07:07](#)):

We showed them and taught them a trimmed down version of what we taught dads so as to create or manufacturer an increased receptivity to co-parenting. So in other words, we wanted to bring mothers in to show them whatever it was we would teach in dads so that they could better understand the types of sacrifices and commitments that the fathers were making.

Dr. Armon Perry ([07:28](#)):

What was interesting in our data analysis is that things that mothers told us that they appreciated the most about that was, number one, recognizing that in many cases, they themselves as the mothers had never really given a whole bunch of thoughts of what it would be like to parent from the perspective or the non-resident dad. And they talked about after going through the workshops and learning more about what it was that we would teaching dads that they themselves had their own self-awareness raised in some ways so they could become more empathic about what it would be like for the dads who don't have an opportunity to engage their children on a day in day out basis. And essentially have their involvement predicated on the extent to which he's able to negotiate access with someone outside of himself, usually the child's mother.

Dr. Armon Perry ([08:16](#)):



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

Mothers talked about the fact that for them, again, these weren't necessarily the specialty conversations that they had ever had with anyone else or even themselves, because based on their custodial status, they were in a privileged position. And their decision making authority had been bestowed upon them where they didn't have to give any consideration to what other people thought about. So it wasn't necessarily there was malice involved there or anything along those lines. It was just that, that was just the way that things were until they were necessarily introduced to a different conceptualization around how parenting looked that they weren't prompted to.

Dr. Armon Perry ([08:54](#)):

And so from that study, it became clear that one of the most important factors in improving the co-parenting relationship was this notion of empathy. So to what extent do mothers and fathers empathize with one another in the role that they have to play in terms of preparing their children for a healthy growth and development. To what extent are they willing and able to walk a mile in one another's shoes to learn about and to appreciate the sacrifices, the level of commitment, the roles that one another were playing and the unique contributions that they both provided to the children's healthy growth and development.

Dr. Armon Perry ([09:35](#)):

And so from there, what we've done, in one of our more current studies is what we're calling an exemplary... exemplary, I'm sorry. An exemplary co-parenting study, where what we're doing is we're identifying men and women who share a child, but who are not married, do not have a romantic relationship and do not co-reside. So in other words, these are folks who they may have had a relationship at one point in time, but that relationship has dissolved. And now the only thing binding them, the only thing linking them is the fact that they share a child. But somehow they have a functional and amicable co-parenting relationship.

Dr. Armon Perry ([10:10](#)):

So the project we're working on now involves identifying 15 of those parenting dyads, and we're engaging them in in-depth qualitative interviews to determine from them the sets of experiences and the perspectives that they share so that we can distill from that is set of practice recommendations to share with the field and share with moms and dads across the country as to how it is that they can find themselves in a situation where they are putting their children's needs first and putting whatever personal feelings about their former partners second or as a backup and not their primary motivation.

Dr. Armon Perry ([10:54](#)):

There are a number of different tips that we've developed from those discussions and conversations and interviews. And the data is still being collected, but some of the preliminary recommendations are first to take a business approach to our co-parenting relationships. Mothers and fathers talking about the idea of that for them taking this business like approach and treating their co-parent as if that person were at colleague at a job rather



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

than as someone they have or continue to have a personal relationship with has helped to keep things clean. They talked about the idea that the communication when it happens via email or text, it removes the opportunity for people to infer based on tone of voice, which may or may not always be accurately described or receive.

Dr. Armon Perry ([11:43](#)):

So in addition to communicating via email and texts, they also talked about the fact that having that type of written communication provides essentially a paper trail or a documentation transcript, so that things don't get lost in translation as easily if they were on the phone or someone gets agitated about whatever may have been going on, and then things get misconstrued. So they talked about taking a business like approach to their co-parenting relationships.

Dr. Armon Perry ([12:11](#)):

They also talked about the identification of shared values. And this is where mothers and fathers have spent time thinking about and having discussions with one another about what their expectations are for their children and also what are their core values. And they've been able to identify where there's overlap in their core value so that if and when they disagree with one another about an important decision regarding their child, they can lean on their discussion related to core values and share common values and core values and allow those things to use as the tie breaker or the decision-making element that they rely on or lean on rather than having to lean on or rely on or default to being emotional about the situation. And maybe saying things that they don't mean or doing things or making decisions that weren't in the best interest of their child, but we're more self-serving in nature.

Dr. Armon Perry ([12:59](#)):

So again, treating the co-parenting relationship as if it were a business arrangement to the identification of shared and core values. And then three, the parents talked about the idea of leaning on support networks. And leaning on support networks has been important for a lot of our parents in a couple of regards. One, from a practical standpoint, if you are connected to either extended family networks or even an effective kin networks, if there's a conflictual relationship between mothers and fathers, the extended family networks or the kin networks or the social support networks provide neutral places for pickups and drop-offs in terms of visitation or parenting time.

Dr. Armon Perry ([13:44](#)):

In addition to that, even as we think about the written communication via text or email, also parents have talked to us about the fact that they lean on those folks to filter out whatever messages they're getting ready to send. So in other words, I might type out a text and send it to someone in my support network and say, what do you think about this? How is it that you're receiving this? Are there ways that this could be misconstrued or taken



THE BLUEPRINT

REIMAGINING THE NARRATIVE OF THE MODERN BLACK FATHER

the wrong way? And it gives you just another set of eyes and another set of ears to be able to bounce thoughts and ideas off of, so that again, we can try to keep the communication as clean and as clear as possible.

Dr. Armon Perry ([14:18](#)):

The other thing that folks are talking about, the social support networks being really, really useful. That is the idea that these are folks who also can serve as sounding boards when inevitably as is the case in any human relationship, there are times when you become frustrated at times when you are despondent. There are times when you've basically had enough for the other person and you don't want to be bothered. They're getting on your nerves or whatever the case may be. And so being able to lean on those social support networks gives you an opportunity to be able to purge those feelings, so you don't feel compelled to try to bottle it all up, but you also are not going about the business of attacking or blaming or coming across as if you're attacking or blaming your co-parent, which can lead to long levels and extended periods of miscommunication, agitation, frustration. And oftentimes it ends with children being used as pawns and parents attempt to gain power and control over one another by using their kids. So in an attempt to avoid some of those things.

Dr. Armon Perry ([15:26](#)):

We've had parents talk to us about the fact that they've been able to keep their co-parenting relationships functional by leaning on their support networks. As we turn our attention to the future. Once that study is wrapped up, we'll be disseminating the findings of it hopefully through a series of not only academic papers, but also policy and practice briefs. Also webinars and podcasts so that we can do our due diligence to make sure that our research and our data gets to the masses in ways that make sense for them and venues that they have access to. And being thoughtful and intentional about doing so, so as to continue to advance our agenda around taking research and translating it into practice, into the lived experiences of the families and the fathers and children that that we're so interested in serving.