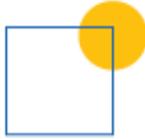




THE BLUEPRINT

Virtual Town Hall



Introduction of the Moynihan Institute for Fatherhood Research and Policy

The Blueprint Virtual Town Hall

September 29, 2020

Transcript

Speaker: Dr. Jeff Shears

Jeff Shears ([00:18](#)):

Hello. My name is Jeff Shears and over the past 25 years, I've been immersed in understanding the impacts of fathers in the lives of children. As a graduate student at the University Of Denver, I was recruited to be the lead research scientist and program director for the early Headstart research and evaluation projects Denver fatherhood study. As you may recall, the early Headstart fathers study is one of the early studies exploring fathering in low income communities with over-representation of ethnic and racial minorities.

Jeff Shears ([00:47](#)):

The study along with a fragile family study were some of the early large studies of fathers. It's mind blowing to think I was afforded the opportunity to work with such groundbreaking research and to think that in these days, these early days, we didn't have access to standard measures of fathering. So matter of fact, in those days much of the research on fathers were from mothers reports of father's attitudes and activities.

Jeff Shears ([01:10](#)):

It really shows how far we've come in our attempts to understand fathers impacts on children and families. On a very personal note are really consider it a blessing to be a researcher in the early Headstart Denver fatherhood project, mostly because my university sponsored research assistantship was over and I needed the money. Although I had a fancy title and a new position, my main responsibility was to contact, interview and collect data from men about being a father.

Jeff Shears ([01:38](#)):

I was so green, didn't know what I was doing. Heck, I any have any street cred because I wasn't a father myself. 20 years later with three children, got some street cred now and numerous publications on fathers, I now realize the true blessing of an opportunity so long ago was to contribute to the fathering literature and provide information on the importance of fathers. Today we have the wonderful opportunity to reimagine the modern



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black father.

Jeff Shears ([02:06](#)):

Again, I'm blessed to continue my work and research on fathers and particularly black fathers with the Moynihan Institute For Fatherhood Research And Policy. I recognize that the name Moynihan may move you in a peculiar way. Many of us remember the 1965 Moynihan report or more formerly known as The Negro Family: The Case For National Action. I certainly recall the discussion as undergrad social work student in North Carolina A&T in the late eighties.

Jeff Shears ([02:32](#)):

During this time, I must admit I never read the entire report, but considered myself a dorm room scholar, as I was knowledgeable about the Moynihan Report, and particularly the critiques from African-American scholars and leaders who are greatly respected. Unlike some of you who might have had to listen to the truths about the Negro Family while sitting at predominantly white institutions, the Moynihan Report was essentially trash from my HBCU perspective.

Jeff Shears ([02:59](#)):

15 years later from my undergrad introduction to the Moynihan Report, I had a PhD and was teaching at Colorado State University ethnic studies department. I actually read the Moynihan Report for myself then. Although my initial process is that the report wasn't vastly changed, particularly around the pathological family and culture, it did provide me an understanding of some policies and issues facing black families and most importantly allowed me to form my own opinions.

Jeff Shears ([03:27](#)):

Jump to 2012, where Kenneth Braswell and The Fathers Incorporated along with the Open Society Foundation and Urban Institute sponsored the Moynihan Hand Report Revisited. For the first time I had the opportunity to dialogue with colleagues during a discussion panel about the issue that the Moynihan report raised regarding the wellbeing of black families. As you may recall, the Moynihan report was a diagnosis of the Negro problem, but failed to offer solutions.

Jeff Shears ([03:55](#)):

The panel discussion allowed us to address the issues that were raised by the report and although I believe we all disagreed with the black family pathology that were espoused, we all agreed that the issues that were realized in 1965 were still impacting black families. The Moynihan report identified issues in a black family that address marriage, out of wedlock births, female headed households and poverty. The often cited yet controversial report argued that in order to impact poverty in the black community, policy changes should focus



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on strengthening families, especially black men and fathers.

Jeff Shears ([04:32](#)):

It should be noted that although the report failed to offer solutions, it highlighted the issues. In subsequent lectures and interviews, Moynihan did offer policies that might directly impact the black family. These range from increased black male teachers in black elementary schools, providing a financial advantage for black fathers to remain in the home and increase in funding for school for black enrollment.

Jeff Shears ([04:57](#)):

If you filter out the issues with the Moynihan report, it does provide a snapshot of black families in the sixties which provides us the opportunity to compare the modern black family. I believe this is an important endeavor to explore, particularly if the highlighted issues of black families remain from long ago and allows exploration of solutions and policies that might impact change. The Moynihan Institute For Fatherhood Research And Policy would utilize this historical work as a launching point to research and introduce policy to impact black families with a father as a focal point, specifically addressing family stability, education, health, and wellness, and popular media representations of black fathers.

Jeff Shears ([05:42](#)):

We operate from the assumption that all children have a father and a biological father and father figures have the potential to be a resource to his child, the child's mother, family, and community. The Moynihan Institute For Fatherhood Research and Policy believes that family stability is paramount in raising physically and emotionally healthy children and will serve as a basis for the areas that we research provide information. Are fathers and black families important? We believe so.

Jeff Shears ([06:11](#)):

We agree that with Moynihan that a healthy marriage is beneficial to children. However, we also expand this notion of family stability or healthy families as we reimagined fatherhood in the black family by exploring how to keep non-residential fathers connected with their children, helping mothers from fatherless homes understand the importance of an involved father in her children's life. The importance of co-parenting and blended families and how intergenerational fathering impacts families.

Jeff Shears ([06:39](#)):

To this end, the Moynihan Research Institute will research and tested best practices for cooperative co-parenting and keeping nonresidential fathers connected to their children and part of the family equation. Although not addressed specifically in the Moynihan report, it is alluded to as the report does address employment, Jim Crow, slavery and reconstruction, all which points to historical educational disparities.



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Jeff Shears ([07:06](#)):

Today, we're more apt to hear educational issues that impact the black family framed as the black white test for a gap or affirmative action in college admissions, urban schools, underperforming school systems, even the support of school vouchers and schools of choice.

Jeff Shears ([07:20](#)):

We agree that the issues are all intertwined with education policies that range from school funding to where underperforming teachers are more likely to be placed. The Moynihan Institute will focus on how fathers can be an educational resource to their children by examining the direct and indirect predictors of children's educational outcomes. The Institute would explore the direct, indirect indicators of fathers impact on children's education and provide community resource to assist agencies in improving fathers impact on a child's educational outcomes.

Jeff Shears ([07:52](#)):

Moynihan did not address health and wellness directly, but one can easily piece together the historical experience of the black family in America and understand how the black family may settle from health and wellness issues. Poverty, stress, historical roadblocks to access are all contributors to the disparities. These historical issues, coupled with suicide rates with black teens, black on black crime rates, police brutality, and media images and the perception of racial injustices are also strong contributors.

Jeff Shears ([08:22](#)):

The Moynihan Research Institute will explore how health and mental health disparities impact African-American fathers and families. We will conduct descriptive studies that address black fathers need for mental health services, who also explore fathers can be a resource for children's health by providing resource with immunities that can be used to target African American fathers. My own research regarding intergenerational parenting suggested that one major influence in father attitudes, parenting styles and fathering activities can be attributed to one's father.

Jeff Shears ([08:55](#)):

Men often emulate their father or compensate in the case of a negative father experience. In the instances of un-involved father, a young man's father and attitudes are greatly influenced through their family, peers and the media. Although we're unlikely to influence family and peers, we can influence understand how media portrays fathers and black families. Consequently, these representations influence society views of black fathers.

Jeff Shears ([09:20](#)):

Most importantly, this influences how young black boys view themselves and normalizes how young black



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women may view black male behavior, particularly as it pertains to romantic relationships and commitment. With a high percentage of black children growing up without a father in the home and many without a persistent active father in the extended family, media perceptions of black fathers are much more influential. Without the positive father relationship, extended family, peers, and media or the large influence on how men learn to father.

Jeff Shears ([09:50](#)):

The Moynihan Institute will conduct descriptive research on how black fathers are portrayed in the media in addition to providing explanatory research on how media images impact fathering activities and behaviors in young black men. It's an exciting time as we attempt to address the issues brought to light over 50 years ago by Patrick Moynihan. The Moynihan Institute For Fatherhood Research And Policy will provide descriptive and explanatory research and policy positions of issues that impact black families from the perspective of fathers.

Jeff Shears ([10:21](#)):

Although the Institute does not agree with all the Moynihan report, we recognize the document is a critical reference point to the issues that impact black families. Our sole purpose is to empower black families and communities through research and policy that focuses on fathers. Thank you.

