

Casework with African Caribbean Fathers:  
Best Practice of Missed Opportunities?

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers opportunities to a segment of our population who sometimes go unnoticed in literature on fathers: African Caribbean fathers. Specifically, this thesis offers fathers an opportunity to define themselves and inform readers of what factors influences them, and how this is translated into the larger picture of their perception and interaction with their own children and service providers, specifically child protection workers at Children Aid Societies.

By no means are the findings in this study conclusive or to be generalized to the larger population. The sample size was small, however, there is value in understanding how these fathers experience fatherhood and what they feel that they do as fathers.

The literature of African Caribbean as fathers is sparse. There is a tremendous amount of negative views on Black fathers, which appears to cross over all thresholds and continents. At the same time, there is a small section of positive literature which looks at the way men define themselves as fathers, and this makes it worthwhile in terms of utilizing a view which can look at the bigger and smaller issues.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great joy and relief that this thesis is finally written, completed and printed. I thank God for the ability for this. It is with his faith, my husband's belief and my friend's questions of "when are you finishing your thesis?", that produced this. I truly rejoice in its completion and I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Professor Gary Dumbrill for his unbending patience. People come into our lives for many different reasons; therefore I thank those special people who came at the right time. They taught me that my heart can love many! They taught me to look at life through different glasses! They are *trying* to teach me patience! They are trying to teach me that if it is worth it then it is worth waiting for! For that, I am eternally grateful and I love them all (RPM, 2007).

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## **Part 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis is about fatherhood. More specifically, it is about Caribbean men and how they view their roles as fathers and what they say they do as fathers. Granted that there are multiple and complex questions which arise from this question, the question that I wanted answered, or was curious about, was “how did the father’s values and culture impact on their understanding of what it means to be a father, and what are the implications for working with these fathers?”

My interest in the topic of fatherhood by Caribbean migrant fathers came through my own experience of being a member of the African Caribbean community, as a child protection worker, and my work with Black children who were in the care of the Children Aid Society, I became curious as to why these children were ending up in care, and primarily where were their fathers. Initially, I ran a group for children who were in the care of the CAS and discovered that many of the younger children (ages 7-10) didn’t know much about their heritage (be it African/Black Canadian or West Indian). What was interesting about the procedure for identifying the children was that social workers at the agency were given a form to identify the demographics of the child and their family. Workers responded that the fathers were Jamaican, but specifically migrant West Indian workers. According to the worker’s information, there were no indications that the father’s were or had been in their children’s lives, but there was knowledge that some were “deported”, or their general whereabouts were identified as “Jamaica”.

While working with these children in care, there was a marked difference between the pre and post adolescent group. The younger children tended to dwell on fantasies about who their

father's were, or that they had even traveled to the Caribbean. This led me to question if they [fathers] knew that they had children who were in the care of the Children's Aid Society (CAS), and if they did, did they know how important they were to their children. Other questions arose, such as how committed the agency and the workers themselves were to locating these fathers, especially if they had a general idea of the whereabouts of these young men. In cases where children are in the care of the Society, or there is some form of court involvement, every effort is made to ensure that both father and mother are served. If a parent cannot be located then a motion to dispense with the parent is made by the CAS.

In discussion with workers, what became evident was the worker's own attitude and reluctance to engage with these fathers' in order to understand the circumstances which led up to them either not being involved with their children. The reluctance could have been either from not knowing to work with fathers or a bias towards fathers in general. At the same time, given the way that child welfare system is predominantly dominated by women, and that women are seen as caregivers, this may also influence the interaction around fathers. According to Sonenstein, Malm, and Billing (2002) "worker's bias against father involvement appears to be a widely researched barrier to father's participating in child welfare case planning" (p.10). Further, Franck (2001) found that birth fathers were ignored by case workers to a larger degree than the birth mother, and in fact fathers had to somehow demonstrate that there was a connection to the child.

Brown, Newland, Anderson, and Chevannes (1997) state that "the situation of men in the Caribbean has only recently come under systematic attention of the research community" (p. 85), and any previous research done on men have been in relation to the perspective of Caribbean women. According to Hamer (2001) Black men "are often publicly portrayed as unemployed,

uneducated, and unwilling to provide or take responsibility for the children they are thought to heedlessly produce (p. 1). Hamer (2001) cites Hall (1981) as suggesting “they [black fathers] are considered somewhat like phantoms or villains and alleged to have demonstrated little or no real feelings for their families’ well-being (p. 159). Much of the attitude and perceptions of these fathers are believed to be due to myths and perceptions of others, such as “custodial mothers, social workers, and social scientific interpretations of the words and experiences they offer” (Hamer, 2001, p. 1).

In researching this topic, there was great difficulty with respect on defining exactly who this study should be focused on, meaning, Black Migrant workers who were from the Caribbean and who were fathers, Caribbean men overall, Black Canadian Caribbean men, and so forth. In the end, I decided to look at African-Caribbean men in general who live in Canada. The literature on Caribbean men is limited, compared to the abundance of literature on Black men and fatherhood in the United States or in Britain. Irrespective of this, there is a clear message regardless of whether it was the Caribbean, U.K or United States: Caribbean men have been portrayed as absent fathers, irresponsible and marginalized from their families.

From my interviews with these African-Caribbean fathers, I gleaned that they are fathers who are complex and overflowing with emotions. They expressed anger, sadness, love, devotion, responsibility, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, frustration and joy. These emotions are best understood and described in relation to their broad sense of what fatherhood means to them. It is hoped that this research project will contribute to compensate for the lack of material on African-Caribbean men, and that it provides evidence that these fathers are more involved in their children’s lives than the stereotypes which exist suggest.

## **Part II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Considering The Past and Present: An Ecological Approach**

The examination of Caribbean fatherhood necessitates us to utilize an ecological framework to understand the family life, obligations, and decisions in “terms of the dynamic social, cultural, political, and economic environments within which they were developed and presently embedded” (Hamer, 2001, p. 5). Hamer (2001) surmises Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theoretical framework as a method for understanding what role each of these elements play in the everyday lives of black families. These elements can be narrowed down to four spheres: the micro system, meso system, exo system, and macro system.

**The Micro-system:** A micro-system may be described as a “pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the individual in a given setting. It is an environment in which fathers directly participate, and it consists of persons with whom he interacts on a face to face basis” (Hamer, 2001, p.6). The assumption is that the “individual behavior and motivations cannot be understood solely from the objective properties of one particular setting without reference to its meaning for the people in the setting” (Hammer, 2001, p.6). For the purpose of this paper, the micro-system which I am concerned about is that of the relationship between the father and the child and how the fathers perceive their respective roles. “Thus prior to studying how men define their fatherhood and analyzing their description of paternal behaviour, we must

understand the external context within which they mediate their parenthood”. (Hamer, 2001, p. 6).

**The Meso-System:** Within this system, it is recognized that the relationships that fathers have with their children are defined by the type of relationships they have with their children’s mothers. “As such, the relationship between the father and child may be encouraged or hindered” (Hamer, 2001, p.7). The interactions between the child and father may also assume other forms, and it is recognized that “fathers also interact with their own parents, siblings, and other kin internal or external to their household” (Hamer, 2001, p.7).

**The Exo-System:** The exo-system is made up of multiple settings which fathers may not have the opportunity to enter, but it affects what is occurring in their immediate environment. This is a system characterized and influenced by the previous and current political, economic and social institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the context of men, their experience is influenced by the forces of the labor market, the educational system, and the arrangements and activities of other working family members.

**The Macro-System:** The macro-system looks at the cultural and political context which encompasses issues of cultural values and expectations, .Family forms may be encouraged or discouraged based on the policies, laws and customs of the dominant society, in this context Europeans (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) “Belief systems, ideology, and culture mostly justify and perpetuate the conditions of each environment. It helps institutionalize notions and ideals about fatherhood and family that exist. In practice, these may vary for demographic groups by race, or ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and various other social and economic factors” (Hamer, 2001,

p.8). The ecological theory framework allows Caribbean fatherhood to be placed in the “historical and cultural environment in which it occurs. “It allows for the analysis of their paternal ideals and attitudes according to the value system of their indigenous culture of subculture, thus providing a more balanced picture of the perceptions, roles, functions, and behaviors of this category of men found in past research. (Hamer,2001, p. 8).

### **Standards of Fatherhood:**

Any discussion with respect to Caribbean fatherhood should be situated within the cultural elements, which includes men’s worlds. Within this perspective, there are belief systems, ideologies, and traditions which define the way in which a parent behaves in a given society. There are public images, embedded within various mediums, which tell men how they should act, how they should look, talk, think, behave, and do as fathers. At the same times, these standards of fatherhood tend to reflect the “experiences, events, and circumstances of a moment in time”. (Hammer, 2001, p. 17). According to Hammer (2001) “from the turn of the century to the 1970’s, ideal fathers were primarily perceived as warmhearted providers on whom all family members could depend for counsel and support. In general, men measured their success as men in terms of their breadwinning role and the standard of living they were able to provide for themselves and their families” (p. 18).

It’s important that when we look at the standards of fatherhood to consider how the European model of fatherhood has influenced and set the standards of fatherhood. Within the United States, the nuclear family, consists of a father, wife, children, and tends to emerge as the idyllic family. Hamer 2001) cites Cherlin’s(1978) point of view that the nuclear family provides “family members with guidelines for proper behavior in everyday family life”(p.18), and

presumably, these guidelines contribute to the unity and stability of families.

The nuclear family form predominates in Western industrial society, and has been the dominant structure of European families as well. Within the Caribbean the structure of the Caribbean family has been historically diversified and has consisted of various types of unions, such as the visiting union<sup>1</sup>. There is the need to recognize that the society and families change. As such, other familial structures need to be recognized as being legitimate and as desirable by some, with the latter being influenced by how individuals have been socialized by their parents, church, friends etc. It is within this context and against the background of the traditional European nuclear family that the African-Caribbean father family structure is examined.

The nuclear family structure has become institutionalized in tradition, policy, and laws. At the same time, this structure receives support via economic and ideological support, which includes legalization of marriages by states, publicly celebrated and announced. There is some expectation that marital partners are committed to each other sexually and emotionally, thus limiting their availability to any outside partners of the marriage. Benefits of the marriage include extended family in addition to the economic benefits of taxes; children also become the benefits of parents, thus allowing them to pick children up from school and enrolling them in extra curricular activities. “As parents, married couples have customary motherhood and fatherhood guidelines. They are expected to coordinate their methods of discipline and to control their children’s behaviors. They are expected to make major decisions regarding their children health and well being” (Hamer, 2001, p. 18-19).

The nuclear family structure seems to be the acceptable guide for defining the main role

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<sup>1</sup> Visiting union is where one or both parents still reside within their own parents home. Visiting relations were apparently established during the period of slavery (Brown, L., & Inniss, T (2005)

and functioning for men. Hamer(2001) summarizes Reissman (1990) view that suggests that it [fatherhood] can be described in terms of “interactional social responsibilities and functions”(p. 19) and that it can be summed up in four categories:

- The legal and genetic endowment that a father provides to his child; fathers provide sustenance to the children in terms of housing and good;
- fathers act as the protector of their children;
- they may participate in the daily care of their children in a direct or indirect manner, and lastly,
- that fathers’ contribute to forming their children’s character and personality

Although there is a recognition that families have changed over the years, the standards of fatherhood haven’t. As such, if presented and packaged properly, the standards may make a good father if measured against the standards of a European-American/Westernized view. For those who aspire to this ideal, a good father is a provider, and as such, the income brought in by the man in the family, is synonymously linked with the male image. Hence, the two fit together and the man’s ability to provide economically for his family is linked to him being a father (Hamer, 2001, p. 19). “A good father is one who is married. He stays around. He is a father who is literally their on the premise. His children need him and he strives to give them what they need, every day. He knows that nothing can substitute for him. Either he is a father or his children are fatherless” (Blakenhorn, 1995, p. n201). The latter statement doesn’t give any room for variations of fatherhood and appears to view fatherhood as either black or white, thus limiting the recognition that families are diversified.

According to Blakenhorn (1995) the ideal father does not live apart from his child(ren). He does not live separate from his wife. He does not contemplate divorce, child support, nor

visitation.. Yet it needs to be recognized that not all men share this standard of masculinity and fatherhood, which is also recognized by Blakenhorn, but contradicts his statement that “either he is a father or his children are fatherless” (Blakenhorn, 1995, p. 201). Regardless of this, there are some who may view the situation of the Black family and the limited marital ties and legal father/child bonds as contributing to the lack of commitment black fathers demonstrate towards their children (Hamer, 2001, p.20). Popenoe (1998) view on this is that “without such formal and legal connections, there exist no rules to govern or control fathers’ paternal behavior. The danger in this statement is that it supports the popular assumption that most black men continue to have children they care little about, which may not necessarily be so.

Economic class further complicates the issue of men’s paternal attitudes and behaviors. Hamer (2001) cites Majors and Billson (1992) *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, position that Black<sup>2</sup> fathers who live away from their children take on a “cool pose”. From this perspective, Black men adapt to the limited opportunities afforded to them and they attempt to maintain some type of control over their manhood by acting in a manner which is aloof and cool toward their children and women, whom they cannot provide. Thus time and time again, Black men maintain this composure in order to maintain some control over their manhood “(p.21). They further go on to imply that Black fathers accept this Westernized ideal of masculinity and fatherhood, each making attempts to provide for themselves and their families, but their attempts are met with negative results, given the political, educational and economic system which they must confront. Hence, their ability to fulfill the role of the ideal father is

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<sup>2</sup> Although Wilson and Billson (1992) utilize the term “Black” instead of African Caribbean, there is substance in utilizing their works to draw on the parallels of the African Caribbean father. I would argue that once identified by “color”, these fathers are then seen as one, thus leading to generalization.

limited and they may be unable to live up to the role of the present and supportive father, and find other means to support their families.

Black men have been characterized in a range from either being “hypersexual to emasculated, from dangerous to less than intelligent, comic or lazy (Hamer, 2001, p. 22), and it is suggested that these men are quite aware of how they are viewed within the public domain. Gibbs (1988) states “Black males are portrayed by the mass media in a limited number of roles, most of them deviant, dangerous and dysfunctional. This constant barrage of predominantly disturbing images inevitably contribute to the public’s negative stereotypes of Black men, particularly of those who are perceived as young, hostile and impulsive “(p.2). Gibbs (1994) goes on to state that “from a very early age, Black males daily receive subtle and overt messages that they are expected to be unsocial, unmotivated and, undisciplined (p. 135) and their self esteem, dignity and level of competence is constantly being assaulted by their surroundings. In her interview with live away father’s Hamer’s (2001) implies that as a result of how father’s have internalized messages received from society and the various systems which influence their view, they [fathers] are making a choice about their interactions and parenting within this context (Hamer, 2001, p. 32).

## **THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF THE CARIBBEAN FAMILIAL EXPERIENCE**

In thinking about how history and culture interacted in the development of the family life cycle of the Caribbean family, I thought it would be pertinent to begin with an examination of the origins of the study of the Caribbean family, in order to shed light on the present familial system. The founding fathers of Caribbean family studies were visiting anthropologists, sociologist and social welfare workers from Britain and the United States. They came from a society of traditional nuclear family systems, whereby there were clear divisions of labor between husband and wife, whereby the family was headed by a man. They were firm in their belief that the family constituted the basic building block on which the whole moral and social fabric of society was constructed. All of them were concerned with the mating and family patterns of the ‘lower class Negro’<sup>3</sup> (Barrow,1996, p.2) and the ever changing family forms of the African Caribbean culture. Given the clear line between husband and wife for the visiting anthropologists, what they saw in the Caribbean was quite different from their European culture. Primarily, gender role definition and performance was diverse in the Caribbean; husbands and fathers were seen as not fulfilling their function of providing economic maintenance and were described as marginal. Conjugal relations were considered to be loose and families’ matrifocal, as women were head of the families, and there existed various types of relationships (i.e visiting relationship) between men and women, contrary to what the anthropologist knew (Barrow, 1996 , p. 3).

Some of these early investigators “found great difficulty in interpreting the diversity and

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<sup>3</sup> The term “lower class Negro” speaks to the times that the research was conducted as at that time, many of the “lower class Negro” families in the New World tended to be matrifocal.

fluidity of Caribbean family patterns. In some cases, this was clearly beyond them. They were shocked that the family, the foundational social institution, was not consistent with their own standards at home. Guided by the theories and assumption developed for the study of their own societies, they not only sought to make sense of what appeared to them as chaotic family structure in the Caribbean, but also in some cases to devise prescriptions for its reconstruction and moral upliftment”. (Barrow, 1996, p. 3).

### **The Two Protagonists:**

In the late 1930’s and 1940’s two protagonist, Euro-American anthropologist Melville Herskovits and African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, “entered into an inconclusive debate concerning the relative influences of African cultural persistence and New World Slavery and post-bellum socioeconomic context on the determination and distribution of family forms among blacks in the U.S and the Caribbean” (Innerarity, 2000, p 59).

Both rooted their analysis in the past and the debate was aimed at “problems of social causation and historical derivation” (Innerarity, 2000, p. 59). Herskovits and Frazier viewed the black family in the United States and the Caribbean as a system which was characterized by “instability, high rates of illegitimacy and maternal households consisting of women and their children” (Innerarity, 2000, p 59). Herskovits was of the opinion that these characteristics were of “African derivation and that they were effects or correlates of practices through which old world polygamy had been modified and reinterpreted by institutionalized serial mating (Innerarity, 2000, p. 60). As for Frazier, he chose to assemble a large amount of data, both on the U.S and the Caribbean. The data collected were related to the social history and the situation of blacks in the U.S. Frazier chose this method to demonstrate “the influence of differing social and economic contexts on their [Blacks] mating and family patterns (Innerarity, 2000, p. 60). As an

example, Frazier showed that as Blacks attained more social status via employment and obtained property, they attained the traditional nuclear family pattern and illegitimacy was rare. For those in the southern rural area, a greater level of illegitimacy was found, in addition to a greater number of families where the household was being led by women, and marriage rates were low.

Frazier's view and hypothesis, as opposed to Herskovits, appeared to have been adopted in the studies of Black families as times progressed. Two other researchers, T.S. Simey (1946) and Fernando Henriques (1949), in their own study on the West Indian family, also noted that blacks were unable to develop stable nuclear families due to social and economic conditions of slavery. Both stressed that the West Indian family life was disorganized and this was demonstrated through "high incidence of conjugal turnover, illegitimacy, and maternal households, the continuing situation of the West Indian blacks as an economically and socially depressed class" (Innerarity, 2000, p. 61). At the same time Simey (1946) and Henriques (1949) contended that there appeared to be social acceptance of these family patterns.

In his book, *The Sociology of Slavery*, Orlando Patterson (1967) also contended that in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, the institution of marriage, regardless of whether it was reflective of the European or African form, broke down under slavery as girls were initiated in sexual activity and the huts where slaves lived were viewed as brothels and the women as prostitutes. From his perspective, there was a discerning pattern of mating and sexual behaviour, which could be noticed. The various types of associations included "prostitution"<sup>4</sup>, unstable unions<sup>5</sup>, stable unions<sup>6</sup>, multiple associations and monogamous associations, which were

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<sup>4</sup> Prostitution was widespread particularly in towns where many white men, having no authority over slave women, such as clerk, sailors, soldiers, artisans, etc, engaged in this activity. (Innerarity, 2000, p. 60)

<sup>5</sup> Unstable unions were more common among young adults and formed without ceremony and dissolved without ceremony ((Innerarity, 2000, p. 60)

interrelated in that the former normally existed within the framework of the latter.” (Innerarity , 2000, p. 62).

There is certainly a recognition by Paterson (1967) that amongst the older and more well off male slaves that there were stable relationships, however other relationships existed with other women, and these relationships were considered loose, as the other women were permitted to have other lovers. Legal marriages and monogamous relationships were also observable, however this was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as slaves were not allowed by law to be married prior to that. Paterson (1967) went on to note that these patterns were more related to a developmental phase over the life span of the slave as oppose to a distinct category. Another phase in the developmental life span of the slave, was that or the matriarchal household, which was sometimes brought on by the death of a husband. Even if there was a husband living within the family home, chances are that the children were not his, as there was a high chance that his relationship only begun after the child bearing years of his current partner. Any children he may have had would also be living with their own mothers on another estate.

West Indian families have been classified in other ways including and not limited to Simey’s (1946) classifications, namely a: Christian families based on marriage and a patriarchal system b) faithful concubinage which included a patriarchal stance, but not marriage c) companionate which is somewhat like a common-law relationship but defined as less than 3 years d) disintegrating families were defined as families where mother’s were raising their own children on their grandchildren To date, the most commonly classification for the typology of

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<sup>6</sup> Stable unions and multiple associations were interrelated in that the former normally existed within the framework of the latter (Innerarity, 2000, p. 60)

West Indian families include (a) marriage, (b) common law, (c) visiting unions (Innerarity, 2000, p 61)

In summary, Frazier's claimed that African culture and the patterns of life which developed among Blacks in the New World were indeed 'artificial and second rate. Barrow (1996) claims that Frazier view is that the attempts made by Blacks were "no more than unsuccessful attempts to copy the standards of white super culture" (p. 6). Barrow (1996) surmises that Herskovits believed that although slavery and post emancipation served to circumvent the belief and practices of Africans, there was still a sufficient contribution made to the New World culture of Blacks. Herskovits (1947) clearly stated that the "contemporary family patterns are not pathological at all, but reflect custom resilience and malleability in the context of Caribbean circumstances" (p. 296).

According to Brown et al (1997) the circumstances of the men in the Caribbean is only now receiving attention from the research community and it has been traditionally viewed within the context of Caribbean women. In particular, they reference 'The Decade for Women'<sup>7</sup>, which produced in the Caribbean, as it did internationally, a wealth of articles, research projects, plays and novels which amplified the voices and visions of Caribbean women. From the women's movement in the Caribbean, there was a calling for changes in the long-standing structure of

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<sup>7</sup> "The World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, held in Nairobi, Kenya from 15 to 27 July 1985, assessed steps taken during the Decade to improve the situation of women and devised strategies for their further advancement during the remaining 15 years of the century. Convened 10 years after International Women's Year (1975), the Nairobi meeting was the third international conference on the status of women sponsored by the United Nations. The first--the World Conference of the International Women's Year--met in Mexico in 1975. A second was held at mid-Decade in 1980, in Copenhagen" ([http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1309/is\\_v22/ai\\_3838336](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1309/is_v22/ai_3838336))

female oppression, and women began demanding, and successfully challenging, that change occur within the patriarchal structure of organizations, such as the government, legal and social organizations. Further, there were rapid advances made by professional women in senior management positions, which were traditionally male dominated. Given that some of the restriction of “family roles, social behaviors and vocational expectations traditionally dictated by gender” (Brown et al 1997, p. 86) Caribbean men were being openly confronted in formal and informal arenas about man-woman relationships, economic and social equity, healthy family life and needs of children. These debates generally addressed the perception of male patterns with respect to behavior and thought (Brown et al, 1997, p. 86).

Within the technological urbanized regions of North American and Europe, there is a growing segment of literature (Engle, 1994), which addresses the area of men and their family. Studies, such as LaRossa (1988) and Lamb (1987), examined the parenting behaviors, roles shift and the psychological state of men, under the *pressure* “to adapt to the changing and emerging roles of women” (Brown and Al, 1997 p. 86). Engle (1994) verified that indeed role shifts were taking place, and men were actively participating, caring, nurturing and sharing the domestic duties with their female partners. Cohen (1990) found results which were opposite, and noted that regardless of the liberating messages which were being conveyed via mass media, women still retained the majority of responsibility in the relationship, and there was no indication of real equity. Brown et al (1997) cite Evans (1995) as stating that the female remains the major givers of children. Given the latter, Brown et al (1997) posed the question as to what was the influence on the Caribbean men, as part of this developing country, which was so affected by the :North America and Europe, yet still economically, politically, historically and culturally different?” (p. 86).

Two research projects at the University of West Indies (UWI) sought to address the lack of data about Caribbean men, and about how they viewed themselves as men, as partners with women, as fathers, and how these views then translated into the broader context of social behaviors and wider cultural patterns. The first two-year study, Brown, Anderson and Chevannes (1993) used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to document the attitudes and behaviours of men in Jamaica in relation to their families of origin and procreation, while the second study by Brown and Chevannes (1995) used a qualitative approach to gain insight into understanding how gender socialization occurred and how it proceeded to manifest itself especially in relation to “boys within the family and the wider community” (Brown, et al, 1997, p.87).

The literature reviews by both authors, Chevannes and Roopnarine, did not uncover much to challenge the common characterization (and caricaturization) of Caribbean men. The literature still portrayed them [Black men] as “absentee or irresponsible fathers, unfaithful partners, frequent perpetrators of domestic violence, and marginalized by choice or circumstance from the mainstream of family life” (Brown et al, 1997, p. 86). The one contention is that the views gathered were from the perspective of women and did little to “filled in very few blanks in our understanding of how men see and know themselves” (Brown, et al, 1997, p. 87). What the literature did was remind people that of the dangers of drawing parallels with other societies whose history, politics and socioeconomic conditions differ widely from the countries of the Caribbean. For example, the matrifocality of the Afro-Caribbean majority is a well known documented historical fact. As previously noted by Herskovits (1941) and Frazier (1961) there is the question of what this phenomenon is attributed to: African retentions of social organizations, remnants of the family organization being influenced by the institution and

practices of slavery and the “economic requirements of its aftermaths” (Brown et al, 1997, p. 88), the continued dominance of female headed household. Edith Clarke’s (1957) research in Jamaica, highlighted the economic conditions which affected family forms. She found that families mirrored the European style (married/patriarchal style) if their income was higher. The lowered income families were more than likely to be female dominated, in addition to other relationships mentioned previously, such as the visiting or common law relationships.

Irrespective of class, Brown et al (1997) notes that Clarke (1957) found that the bond between mother and child was close within the family with fathers, when present, who assumed the “effectively distant roles of disciplinarian and provider” (p. 88). In no means is there a suggestion that fathers who visited or were frequently absent were not important factors in the family life. On the contrary, they [fathers] “were still expected to provide discipline (especially in brining up sons) and financial support for their children from present and former unions. Subscription to the concept of male family headship-even among women headed households-remains a common reflection of the patriarchal structures that still dominate the social, economic, and political structures outside the family, and also reflects the strength of female expectations of male responsibility” (Brown,et al, 1997, p.88) Other surveys, such as Chevannes (1985) in Jamaica, and Dann (1987) in Barbados, solidified and supported the fact that in those countries men also saw their primary functions as financial provisions for children and moral up-bringing/discipline, the latter particularly for the boys.

Again, in looking at the Caribbean, it is important to note that there have been many historical and social factors, such as “colonization and slavery, African and Indian religious and cultural retentions, interwoven with Europeans forms of Christian worship and social organization, and the powerfully influences of deep-rooted urban and rural poverty, caution

against social analyses or prescriptions resulting from cultural contexts outside the Caribbean. This is even more emphatically true when such sensitive and culturally determined phenomena as gender roles and family functions in children rearing are examined” (Brown,et al, 1997, p. 89).

The 1992 research from the University of West Indies established that men generally displayed more positive child and family directed behavior and attitudes contrary to popular stereotypes. The research identified that men were able to clearly state what obstacles, personal cultural and social, they believed hindered their ability to be better fathers. These same men pointed to an agenda for themselves in relation to children and family life. It was recognized by them that the agenda needed to be defined by men, and not within the context of being aligned with the perspectives and assumptions about what men should be doing, but rather than from men’s own initiatives to establish themselves as fathers, to define how they want to interact with their children, and to tackle challenging issues of gender inequity and new role paradigms

With respect to defining their new roles, Chevanness (2002), in *Children’s Rights: Caribbean Realities*,, points out that with the changing demographics patterns in Jamaica, new ways of expressing the status of father are being demanded and found. He points to Jamaica as an example, in terms of there being evidence that men are engaging in “nurturing roles as playing and counseling, with no recognition as their roles primarily remains that of a provider” (p. 221). The role of the father continues to be that of socializing the child, particularly the boy child, and it becomes the father’s to apply control over his son, in order to ensure that he grows up into a socially responsible person, who does not deviate from the norms and values which is being taught at home. “Fathers are thus expected to be the authority figure, a status that is not consonant with interference in the day to day running of the household, or activity (Chevannes,

2002, p. 221). In such examples, fathers may appear to be distant, however it is within this context that the father's authority lies as it is his role to enforce the moral upbringing of the child. Within this context it is usually the boy child who feels the disciplinary hand of the father, as the father's contact with the girl child begins to diminish as she nears puberty. Another significant aspect of fatherhood is the bonding which is derived from face to face contact and presence with their children. Difficulty though arises when the father must find ways to deal with his outside<sup>8</sup> children as problems arise in this aspect with the expression of their paternal instincts (Chevannes, 2002, p. 222).

In summary the devaluation of fathers and husbands in the home, includes the historical factor of enslavement and material constraints, loss of authority, and control. Given that the same social processes that give men power and privilege in a patriarchal society, cause men pain, it can also diminish and distort their capabilities and capacity

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<sup>8</sup> Outside children are derived from other relationships which may be in the form of casual relationships. It becomes difficult for the father to then express his role as they may be unable to visit and play with their outside children as frequently as they would like to. Depending on whether the relationship breakup was acrimonious, the possibility of contact with the outside child remains hopeful, thus the father's chance of "performing a constructive fatherhood role increase" (Chevannes, 2000, p. 222).

### **Part III**

#### **The Research:**

Due attention should be given to the fact that men are not homogeneous, nor are the women to whom they relate. For more reasons than one, the experience of Black men and women in the Caribbean has been very specific. The Caribbean experience of power has been shaped by enslavement and oppression. Within society and from history and present situations (i.e Oka Crisis, Rodney King) we have learned that oppression breeds resistance, and in turn societies of oppression breed resistance to oppression, so that the history of oppression is also the history of struggle against oppression. In this sense, there is the need to recognize the concept of the person is political, since the situation of that one person is thus the situation and experience of all and not his or hers alone. Given the latter, it then becomes necessary to understand how the world of fathers is socially constructed and interpreted by themselves, and how they interact within the micro, meso, and macro systems which affect their lives. What are the implications for these fathers in their own work with child protection workers, and how does their experience, values, and culture impact on their understanding of what it means to be a father?

#### **Methodology**

In order to capture what the fathers say that they do as fathers, a qualitative grounded theory approach was utilized. Participants were interviewed to ascertain the ways they were socialized and how they conceptualized the concept of what fatherhood meant to them. Semi-structured interviews, lasting between one-two hours were held with each participant. The interviews were audiotaped and the notes were transcribed in a timely manner in order to reduce the loss of important details.

The participants were given the Information letter (Appendix A) and they were requested to sign Consent Forms (Appendix B). Respondents were then asked to provide demographic information about themselves, such as their name, where they were born, how long they have been in Canada, and what their status was (i.e migrant worker, immigrant, citizen).

The respondents were then asked to provide a narrative of what their experiences was growing up in the Caribbean. Respondents were asked to describe who were the members of their families; how their household task were handled in the home in terms of gender, gender role expectations as perceived by them, their peer experiences as a child, adolescent, and adult. An interview guide was utilized to aid the interview process.

A member checking process was offered to participants whereby fathers were offered an opportunity to receive a copy of the interviews and a draft copy of the thesis to ensure the trust of the participants. One participant requested a copy of his interview and a draft copy of the thesis.

One other aspect that is important to mention is the language used in particular by one specific father. There was discussion between myself and my partner as to whether one of the father's words should be translated to standard English in order to convey his message due to the use of his patois<sup>9</sup>. In the end, I decided to have the father's word reflected in the true essence of which he spoke. From this aspect, I thought it added to the trustworthiness of the process, in

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<sup>9</sup> Jamaican Patois, otherwise known as Patwa, Afro. Jamaican, just plain Jamaican or, Creole, is a language that has been until quite recently referred to as "ungrammatical English." (Adams, 1991, p . 1)

"The technical definition of the term Creole means-, a language which comes into being through contact between two or more languages. The most important part about this definition is that a new language comes about which was not there before, yet it has some characteristics of the original language(s) and also has some characteristics of its own. The Creole of Jamaica and the Caribbean is referred to as an 'English-lexicon' and this language came about when African slaves were forced into a situation where English, or at least a very reduced form of English, was the only common means of communication. The slave traders and owners spoke English while the slaves spoke a variety of African languages and the slaves had to assimilate by learning English which explains why much of the vocabulary is English in origin. Although there is much English vocabulary, many words were also adopted from African languages when no equivalent English word could be found such as, words for people, things, plants, animals, activities, and especially religious words". (Sebba 1996, p-50-51).

addition truly using what he said in the true narrative sense. In addition, utilizing patois within the interview process also is part of this father's own identity and may be viewed as a form of resistance to mainstream society.

### **Theoretical Base:**

In analyzing this qualitative study, the method utilized was the *grounded theory approach*<sup>10</sup>, which is a means of analysis that requires study from each interview, before continuing with further data collection. In order to assess the themes, the initial interview is analyzed line by line, and emerging codes are coded. All interviews therefore are compared to the prior interview, and “certain theoretical propositions emerge that link between categories and/or link to a core category, which appears central to the study (Dick, 2002). As the categories and properties emerge, they and their links to the core category provide the theory (Dick, 2002) . Throughout the life on the coding and analysis, notes are written about the data and this is referred to as memoing. Eventually the core category and its link saturate thus rendering no further knowledge gained from the interviews and they cannot add to what is already known in a category, its properties and its relationships to the core category (Dick, 2002). Sorting is the next step when saturation occurs. Similar memos are grouped together and sequences in and order which gives clarity to the emerging theoretical base (Dick, 2002).

### ***DESIGN, PROCEDURE AND PARTICIPANTS:***

Prior to beginning this research it was necessary to seek and obtain approval from the McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB), to receive clearance to involved human participants as part of this research. The MREB approval was forwarded to a Children's Aid

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<sup>10</sup> This study utilizes a grounded theory approach as oppose to formal grounded theory because the nature/scope of this study would not allow for a formal grounded theory to emerge from the data collected .

Society prior to the Children's Aid Society allowing me to access staff and participants. Again my interest was to speak with migrant fathers' from the Caribbean who were consumers of the CAS as I truly felt that their voices were not captured. The Executive Director of a Children's Aid Society, gave me permission to begin the research, and I was linked with another Director, who assisted me in the beginnings of the research. I identified that I wanted a liaison within the agency, who participating social workers would be able to provide information to and then have it passed on to me. I also identified that I wanted to interview four-five fathers who were involved with the Children's Aid Society, and who were also aware that they had children in care I was cautioned by the Director that even though there had been previous studies conducted in the Children's Aid Society and it was a daunting task to get people involved, with the barrier of paper work being a barrier to active involvement from the workers, and indeed it proved difficult to get participation.

Looking back, I felt that I initially boxed myself in by initially identifying migrant workers as my sample. In my thought process about this, I knew that I was looking for fathers who were "migrant" workers, thus making them seasonal workers who sometimes return to their country after they have completed their jobs. I did not make any distinction that these fathers may end up getting married thus negating their "migrant" status. I then realized the error and I broadened my focus to look at African Canadian/African Caribbean fathers on a broader scope and not limited only to fathers involved with the Children's Aid Society.

Eventually I was able to interview three African Caribbean fathers of various class status: Two were former migrant workers from Jamaica and had in fact married local women from their community. Another father was also from the Caribbean and was also married. Two of the fathers were in the process of separating while another was divorced. One father continued

to live with his partner even though they were in the process of separating. All three fathers had access to their children, and it ranged from being unsupervised to supervised access visits.

The interviews were held in various locations: a restaurant, a participant's home and in my own home. All participants were explained the process and why the research was conducted.

### **Cultural Review**

When meeting these fathers and conducting this research there were a lot of emotions I found myself experiencing. My curiosity was peaked as I found myself engaged in looking for literature on Caribbean men and their perception on fatherhood. The limited amount of positive information available on Black men proves to be equally infuriating, as one begins to contemplate the cost to society in the continued negative portrayal of Black men to the wider society. Unfortunately, the stereotypical viewpoint which portray Black men as unavailable and irresponsible were found in general conversation with friends of mine. I found myself looking for and being attuned for the positive that Black men were contributing to their children and their partners, and realized that even though it may not be what my own ideal is, there is worth, dedication and hard work amongst these men. Coming from a field that engages more with women than men, it's easier to see how fathers get neglected and how they have to prove their commitment before a worker will engage with them.

At times, I found myself becoming upset with the system for what I felt was misleading information and demands on a father, with no thought as this father's own cultural upbringing and a westernized method of treatment for enhancing his parenting skills. It was further complicated by the lack of literacy skills attained by this young man, who could not understand his court documents, and clearly had no knowledge of the system. I remember coming home extremely upset from this interview and enraged by the assumption made by the manager that

this participant had “poor English”. Questions which arose in my mind were more around whether or not the person who referred him to me truly understood what was being said given this particular father’s very pronounced accent; the use of patois; and the rate at which he spoke. In meeting with him, it was evident that he spoke quickly, and that a trained ear had to be applied to listening, if not it would be difficult to understand him. Instead of being viewed as someone with “poor English”, I would argue that given his origins and the history of the Caribbean, his use of patois may be viewed as a form of resistance to the oppression Caribbean people faced in Jamaica. In actuality, one view of patois is that it was developed as an effective act of resistance that was first invisible to the slave masters. This particular father’s use of his patois encompassed the context of his upbringing and the influences of this may have been missed, thus ignoring the larger forces which also may explain the perceptions and actions of this father, and negating this father’s identity

I did find myself during this particular conversation struggling with not giving advice and keeping the lines clear with what my purpose of the interview was. Unfortunate or fortunate, the experience provided me with an eye opener and noticing how I believe the system failed this particular client, and how it fails fathers and tends to streamline clients into cookie cutter interventions which may not meet their specific needs (i.e cultural etc).

## **PART IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS:**

The original question seeking to be answered was what was the perception of fatherhood by migrant Caribbean fathers? This study provided three father's with the opportunity to share their perceptions, beliefs and thoughts about this topic, and about their working relationship with CAS.

This study utilized the grounded theory approach, which links the themes found throughout the category the research to a core category. The participants utilized in this study consisted of three fathers, two who were in the process of being separated and one divorced dad. Two of the father's children were in the care of a Children's Aid Society, while the other father's children were residing with their mother. The participants ranged from mid 30's to late 40's, and were all employed on a full time basis. All the fathers immigrated from the Caribbean, with one participant having been in Canada for 22 years, while the others ranged from 5-9 years. Two of the participants described their parents as working class, while another noted that his father held a government job in the Caribbean, and the family was quite well off (i.e chauffeur, maid).

Caregivers in this study discussed their relationship with their children and drew on their experience with their own parents to guide their relationship with their own children. Themes were generated where there were two or more categories agreed upon or discussed. Themes which were discussed consisted of their roles as disciplinarian; provider; availability of themselves for their children in providing emotional support. The participants feelings about being involved with CAS ranged from being negative to positive, with obvious frustrations and feelings of failure from the system to support them at times.

### **What Fathers Say They Do**

The world of fathers goes beyond the links which exists between their children and themselves. The task of daily living allows fathers to interact with other individuals in a broader context, some of which may or may not directly affect their fatherhood. Some fathers have intimate relationships, some fathers have remarried, some have kids with other women, all of which affects their interaction with their children. In order to understand what these fathers are able to provide, it must be understood in the context of these interactions. Whether or not a father visits his children, sees them in a supervised context, or “hangs out” with them or take them to the movies, it must be balanced with other issues the father is facing himself in their daily lives. The amount of hours a father spends at work; if he can get time of work; the distance he lives from his children; substance use and financial constraints, all impact on how they choose to negotiate their time as fathers.

This section of the thesis reflects what fathers describe that they do as fathers. The level of activity varies, as some fathers have no contact or sporadic contact with some of their children from other relationships. Some of these fathers wish they could be there everyday, some yearn for their children to be in their care, some felt overwhelmed with their own personal struggles and life issues.

The fathers interviewed had their own experiences with their fathers which they drew on. All three men grew up with their fathers and mothers, along with their siblings. There was no direct questioning on whether they thought they would have done things differently, but these fathers based their definition on what fatherhood means to them by what they saw their own father’s do Overall, the categories which were evident from the research included, their ability to spend time with their children was of paramount importance; providing emotional support;

providing for their children financially; providing discipline, and being a role model.

### **Spending Time With Their Children:**

One of the most important insights gained from this study, was the father's ability to negate the negative stereotype of the absent Black father. Although these fathers did not currently have custody of their children, it was obvious that spending time with their children was of importance. Two participants who are experiencing difficulties with their teenagers, stated that they know that they have to be available for their children to guide them. One spoke about wanting his son to eventually live with him in order to provide guidance to him, while the other spoke about his son visiting him and calling him from detention a few times a week. Spending time with their children occurred in various contexts, whether it was by phone calls, actual weekend/weekday visit, or supervised visits. One father stated that he visited his children every Monday, and in fact would not meet with me on a Monday due to this. His employer was aware that his children were in the care of the Society, and as such, his employer gave him the time off on Mondays to see them.

Another father spoke about needing to see his children, and the difficulties that he encountered with the mother of his children if he did not pay his child support, meaning that he may not see the children at all. The relationship then took on an antagonistic aspect and this determined whether or not he would have access to the children. Sonenstein, Karin, Billing (2002) concluded in their study that "mothers may act as gatekeepers, either facilitating or blocking access to the father" (p.15).

With their children, many of the father's in fact had a yearning to be with their children and one father summed it up by stating

"me luv me babies dem.. me treat dem good ya know. I don't treat me baby dem bad. I

love me baby dem. If me baby...I luv dem ya know. When I go visit dem lots ah tings I carry fa dem ya no.

Spending time with their children were seen as sometimes a structured arrangement and an other times, an informal arrangement if possible. Spending time with their children also meant talking with them by telephone or running over to see them quickly, or the children having a day off from school and being with them, or taking them to the movies. One father spoke of spending time with his son during the Christmas holidays, even though he did not get to see this particular son much. At the same time it was clear that this father, amongst another, were struggling with the lifestyle their children were choosing. Nevertheless, one father stated that

I want to be there for him but I am trying to focus, struggling. I got a full plate right now and I want to be ..for him. I got to be really strong.

He further added that

I want to try and get things organized in my life where I could have a plan for him, not just come and sit down because I am rushing around and getting to work.

The mother of this particular son also wants him to support the son by having the son live with him. Given that some of the fathers' times with their children are controlled by institutions, they made the most of the visits by purchasing clothing or food for the children and by not missing the access visits they had set out for them by the social institution.

One particular father indicated that his father was “instrumental “in his life, and was always available for him and he wanted to be available for his children as well. This father stated that he spoke to his own father on a daily basis and commented that

I spoke to my dad every day, twice a day. My dad would call me , like I was 35 or 37 years of age, and I am living in [name of town removed] and my dad would call me and

ask me if I washed my car on Sunday”. He felt that his dad wanted the best for him in everything.

### **Emotional Support:**

Providing emotional support by being available for their children was also important to the fathers. Although the ways in which the father’s demonstrated this, given their particular situations, they chose to make themselves available to receive telephone calls from their children as one method. While one of the father’s was being interviewed, his son telephoned him and the conversation ended with “I love you”. Another father makes himself available via the telephone on a daily basis when his children can call. They may call to say hello or they may be upset at each other, especially if the son has to baby-sit his sister.

The father’s were encouraged by their own parents to do well in school and one father in particular stated that his own father expected him to study and do well, and he as such expects the same from his own son.

What was evident from all three men, was their expectation that their children could count on them regardless of the situation. All three fathers stated their availability for their children, and in fact, one father stated that he had contemplated sending his son back home to the West Indies, but he felt he could not do that given that he did not want his son to think that he abandoned him.

The fathers also had the support of their own extended family. All three fathers came from families with anywhere from 3 to 9 siblings. With the exception of one father, the children were familiar with their extended family and the extended family also provided support to the children. One of the fathers spoke to turning to his sister as a support for the children and his sister’s ability to keep an eye on the children when he entered into rehab. He also utilized the

sister to provide him with any difficulties encountered around the children. A father remarked that

my sister tries so hard, she talks to them [his kids] on a regular basis and tries to promote the family unit

Unfortunately, according this father, this relationship has suffered due to the antagonistic relations between the father and the mother of his children. Another spoke of turning to his mother for support with his son when he was having difficulty with him. This father struggled with coming to grasp with his child's behaviour as he felt that his parents didn't "grow them like that".

For one father it was absolutely important for him to provide emotional support to his children, and he chose to get involved in their schooling. Recognizing that education was important, but that this wasn't a strong area for him, he got involved with his children's school by volunteering at their school; having a BBQ at his home for the teachers; and advocating and locating tutors for his children in math or spelling. For this particular father, he clearly stated that

I was good at the nurturing stuff. I loved to change the diapers, walking them to the school bus, riding their bikes and playing with them. You know, the nurturing stuff. I really enjoyed that. Teaching them how to have good manner and being polite, how to share and how to be a good citizen is stuff that I like to do with them.

### **Providing Discipline.**

The fathers felt that discipline was also a function of their role. One particular father reminisced on how he grew up in the Jamaica, compared to how his son grew up. He explained that

"like back home you know..you could get away with a lot. You could get away with a lot of stuff. You could hit your kid, you know what I mean, as you know as a West Indian person, you know what I mean. And nothing would come of it. Ammm, when I say hit down, like no abusing. If you abuse your child, you

know somebody know that the police would come and get you. So you know what I mean...now it's different here [Jamaica]. He went on to explain that his own cousin was charged as his daughter said "something" at school. This particular father recalled that he was disciplined by his own parents and that they "would grab me up or whatever, and be like you know you're not suppose to do that, you know what I mean and you know, who do you do that. You know, if I have an explanation still, you know what I mean, they still you know, spank me on top of that...you know like that would be happening, that would be happening not all the time".

He also went on to add that when his parents told him not to do something and he did it, then they would be "like o.k, you're not listening then you will feel that". He connected that the discipline his parents provided to his siblings and himself grew "everybody sound and fine...and none of them didn't get badly damaged or anything, no internal bleeding or anything..".

This father was able to draw on his experience with Children's Aid as positive, while at the same time commenting that the system made him feel powerless with his own child in regards to discipline. Although this particular father realized that he could not discipline his son in the manner in which he was raised, his frustration with what he perceived as his son taking advantage of the situation they are in, only added to his sense of powerlessness. This father believed that his son was being told to do things although he did not elaborate by who, but stated his son had pushed him

"a couple of times and I can't do nothing....he step out through the door and say he's leaving and I can't even touch him".

This particular father reflected back as to how he could not speak to his own parents in the manner of which his son spoke to him. He stated:

"I couldn't deal with my dad like that, you know what I mean ?"

Another father stated that his own father was the disciplinarian within his family and his mother

did not take on that role. He went on to say that his father:

disciplined in the British way and it was controlled discipline. I got a warning and then third time I got licks [spankings]. I had to go and get the wire cane from the tree branch and I had to put out my hand. If I moved my hand I would get an extra lick, but it wasn't done in a mad that was mad like an ox. It was done from a sitting position. I was grateful for the licks caused it helped me.

When discussing this topic, this particular father was grateful for his own upbringing.

Although he disciplined his children, he claimed that he does not follow through with holding to disciplining his own children. He easily admitted that he wasn't very good with it and that it was very rare that he disciplined his children. The father certainly echoed another father's statement which indicated that he could not speak to his own father in the manner that many children speak to their parents. He stated:

There was that look. That look that when my father gave me I knew to stop whatever it was I was doing

This father still knew that his children expected him to discipline them but chose to do it via communicating with them. He reflected on his style and made the following comments:

I do it [discipline] through communication by talking to them about the situation. For example, with my son and his room. I want him to keep it clean, so I may tell him or ask him how I can help him keep everything nice and tidy. How can I encourage you to help you clean up your room. I try to find a way of how they want to keep it nice. My communication skills is a bit different. I want wants to empower them and not to be a dictator. It's a lot easier when you want to do it then when you have to do it. The last time my children came over, they cleaned up their rooms without me asking. I was so proud of them man. I want to use other techniques to empower them.

Reflecting on whether he felt his father's discipline influenced his decision to utilize another technique, he stated "not really". He knew in his heart that "my father loved me. I knew that.

**Providing Economic Support:**

What was clear from the interviews was that fathers still viewed themselves as being a financial provider for their family. A lot of this was seen within their own family with their parents, and they took this same role on within their family setting. All three fathers spoke of working hard and of providing financially for their children regardless of if the children were with them, or in care of an institution or other family members. One participant identified that he felt that it was his responsibility to provide for his partner and child, and defined his own home based on what he saw as a young child between his own mother and father. For this participant, he identified that his father would give his mother his paycheck to manage the finances, and he implemented this same system within his own home when he had his child. He commented about his father

his, his..is get the money, get the money and bring it in. Bring it in to my mom and mom would look after it”.

Others ways fathers felt they were providing for their children financially were by supporting their children through custody orders, and by buying food and other necessities for their children whether they were at home or not. One particular father prided himself on purchasing 120.00 worth of groceries for his family and dividing this into three parts. One part he kept at home, while his wife would take food to their children at their access visits on one day and he would take food at his visits, which were on a separate day. This particular father felt that his responsibility also included taking care of his extended family, and he continued to send money back to his country for them. He went on to add that he provided financially for his other child when he lived in Jamaica by picking

“orange, work on truck and dem ting you know. I give dem money you know”

Embedded within the context of the conversations was a heavy concept of responsibility that these men felt to their children. Responsibility for taking care of their children; a desperate need to see their children, responsibility for spending time with them and supporting them. One participant explained that although he was only 17 when he had his child it was pretty rough...I just had to do it because it was my responsibility, and you know I just make up my mind to do it. Yeah, it was ok but it was, this life was tough”.

I give me clothes of me body fah dem what I tell you...anyting de want de ah get. De want Macdonald’s de get Macdonalds’, de want burger king de get burger king

The same father felt that it was important to provide for our children and that it was important to

treat dem [children] good and ting, don’t mek dem hungry; don’t mek dem wants, anyting de wants you see, anyting de need de get, anyting de call fah ah get it

### **Fathers Perception Of Their Interaction With CAS:**

When asked about their interaction with the Children’s Aid Society, all three fathers expressed a sense of frustration and a lack of understanding the system. The frustration for the fathers were particular to not understanding the system or how it worked. For one particular father, it was evident that he was not aware of the status of his children’s case due to his literacy level, and yet from first glance it appeared that no one may have communicated that this father’s children were on the verge of being adopted.

Another father echoed his own frustration with the following statement:

That is what I find appalling. I was hoping that the organization would support me in being a good dad...by supporting me in my efforts to being with my kids. When I see an organization that is there to separate the family instead of promoting the family...I asked people if there was a course that I could do and no one knew. I want the best for my children. I want them both in my care and their mother’s care. I’ve begged them [Children’s Aid] to call me ...to be honest with you, I don’t think they support the best

interest of the kids and the parents, and the reason why is because they don't communicate. I asked for a follow up...it's disappointing and all I do is ask and I don't hear back from them. No one, never heard back from no one. I ...I just wish..if the organization would communicate with dads, I would, I would, I wanted to work. I wanted to work but I don't know what to do to make it work.

The father's interaction with the child welfare system is similar to that found in child welfare research with fathers. According to a research by Biling, Malm, Sonnestein, (2002) traditionally fathers have not been as involved in child welfare case planning as mothers and it is suggested by the authors that factors which affect this may be a systematic bias on the part of workers, the gatekeeping of the mother and the non custodial father's own situation, which may include violence or substance use, in addition to fathers not reaching out themselves when effort is made by the child protection worker (p.10).

Frustration with the child welfare system led one dad to consider whether or not the system was biased against him due to him being "Black". Faced with a lack of communication and other barriers, including not knowing how the system worked, the father felt that was the only conclusion he could draw

how can I have faith in the system that is designed to help me fail? I find that totally..I don't know if it is because I am Black or what, it has failed me. I don't have the resource to get a lawyer.

Another father described his experience as both frustrating and beneficial. Specifically, he pointed to being requested to visit the agency as an inconvenience, given that he had to work. In addition, the pointed questions asked by the social worker were seen as making him out to be irresponsible:

ammm with the social, sometimes with the social worker questioning too which the ask me of making me and stuff like that, like that you know, kind of like you know, make me feel like I am not responsible sometimes

Not all interaction with the workers were negative, all three fathers spoke of some positive attribute of their social worker. One father stated that his worker

use to come and visit me all the time

Another father indicated that he was so use to his worker, and that

if he was to...to leave and somebody take over, you know it's hard then. I'd have to go through all of that that already....[my worker] know me, so you know it's a lot easier

One father pointed out that he had a worker who he initially communicated with, and he also saw his child more frequently during that period. The father was unable to cite what he felt contributed to more access, and didn't appear to care as he was happy to see his kids. He cited

I am not sure how it works. I was happy to see my kids and I know they were happy to see me.

Certainly the benefit of having one worker and not having to retell one's experience, may make for a better working relationship. This father echoes the frustration of workers and clients themselves, who are sometimes experiencing have to tell their stories over and over again as the turnover rate of social workers occur.

## PART V

### **DISCUSSION:**

From the interviews conducted with the fathers, it was evident that they wanted to meet their responsibility to their children, and to be viewed as responsible Black men. Society has portrayed Black [Caribbean, African etc] fathers as absent from their children's lives. The men in this research are not unemployed as the stereotype portrays. They are not unwilling to provide for their children. Even with a lack of constant employment, father's provided to the best of their

ability even when faced with challenges. For the most part, the financial support didn't appear to be as important as the need for the fathers to be with and to be available for their children.

Society appears to expect all men to fit the same category, that of the Western ideal of fatherhood, some of which these fathers have incorporated into their own realities and experiences. Although these fathers did not live with their children, they had to choose an alternative to the ideal family which reflects a patriarchal stance; they had to choose an alternative to this historical tradition. The fathers believed that they played an important and essential part in their children's lives, and appeared to place this above the financial obligation they had for their children. Although not spoken about in depth, some clearly drew on their own relationship with their parents and extended family as a source of support and comfort for themselves, and viewed their parents as the one's who provided the example.

Even though the men interviewed were not living with their children, they were clearly not "absent" fathers. They continued to remain involved, whether through supervised access visits, telephone calls, on weekend visits. The ability to see such examples as being involved may be challenging for some. The examples negate the negative and constant barrage of negativity associated to black fathers as being irresponsible. According to the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (2003, para 1) "the current image of Black fathers and sons is almost totally negative. The popular perception is that Black fathers and sons are generally socially irresponsible; they are often portrayed as delinquent in the performance of their duties as spouses and seem to be uninterested in nurturing their offspring. Like most stereotypes, this negative portrait is an exaggeration of the reality. Regrettably, the internalization by Black people of this negative image has contributed to the low self esteem in the community".

( <http://www.umes.edu/blackfathers>) . At the same time, the negativity and perception has aided

fathers in constructing how they see fatherhood. They have set their own norms, and thus achieved a sense of freedom for themselves.

For two of the father's they will have to negotiate their way back into their children's lives. One would like his first son to live with him, yet he is struggling with his own substance abuse issues and is well into recovery; another has no known information which suggests the concrete whereabouts of his first child; and another child's mother has been absent from his life since he was 7 months of age. Within the black community there is a known saying "baby fathers or baby mothers". What "baby father" implies is that this is a father who in every sense of the word, had fathered a child but is not being "responsible" for the child, but may come around now and then. The men in the study displayed contradictory behavior to this concept of "baby fathers". Certainly the fathers have faced challenges, but it doesn't appear that they are not up to the challenges.

### **Negotiating CAS:**

The voice of these fathers come at a particular time when the Children's Aid Societies are embarking on a "transformation" within the child welfare system to a model known as Differential Response, which encompasses two varied responses which guides how child welfare workers respond to investigations. Namely, there is the forensic approach and the custom approach; the forensic approach permits workers to respond in the traditional investigative approach of interviewing the child first, while the custom approach allows child welfare workers to respond in an approach which is more "family centered".

Differential Response rest on child protection workers being able to engage with families in a therapeutic manner, thereby providing opportunity for clients to tell their story. The manner that child welfare workers approach families will obviously differ and may prove to be a

challenge for some. Being a manager, and having worked as a front line worker in child protection, I can see how some difficulties may occur as workers embark on what they perceive to be a new way of working. Given that child welfare has been a traditional field dominated by women, fathers appear to get pushed aside as workers thrive to engage their wives or mothers of their children.

In reviewing my interviews, I am left with the sense that the fathers interviewed did not believe that they were heard fully by their workers. In fact, I am unsure as to whether they were able to tell their full story in the manner in which they did in the interview. In reviewing literature by Sonenstein, Malm and Billing, (2002) contend that although there are even without the existence of published studies about non custodial fathers' involvement in child welfare case planning, worker's bias plays a main barrier to engaging fathers' participation child welfare planning (p 10). They went on to indicate that in their 1990 review of five major social work journals which spanned over a 27 year period, the literature available concentrated on the negative aspects of fathering.

Certainly, the challenge becomes for workers to move away from an approach which views parenting as a female dominant role and being able to recognize that regardless of the father's status within the family, that even they need to view the interaction in a broader scope. From personal experience in reviewing child protection worker's investigations, effort is not necessarily put into locating fathers at times. It appears that a father's involvement is sometimes viewed as an after thought, unless they father has custody of the children, which may cause the dynamic to differ.

Other factors which could also contribute to child protection worker's engagement with fathers may also be due to a lack of guidance and not knowing how to engage fathers, even

though the internal policies indicate that parents are to be interviewed, and investigations are set up to include both parents. Perhaps another consideration has to be that even the training offered by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies do not include specific training on how worker's engage fathers, but speaks more on a general level of engaging with families.

One aspect not explored in my interview, but worth consideration, is the issue of race and how this may influence the interaction between workers and fathers. Billing, Malm and Sonenstein(2002) cites Leashore's (1997) statement that "the involvement of fathers may be even more difficult when White caseworkers are dealing with the fathers of African American children. Child welfare caseworkers are described as possibly having fearful or stereotyped perceptions of African American men. These caseworkers may hesitate to involve fathers even though African American and Hispanic fathers are reported to have higher rates of shared child care responsibility than do White fathers (p.12). There needs to be a consideration that due to the limited amount of positive information about Black men, and Black fathers, this may support the assumptions about them [Black fathers] and their relationship with their children. If there is nothing to challenge this perception, what does this mean for families, fathers, and children?

### **LIMITATIONS**

Looking back at the five years it has taken me to complete this thesis, some of the limitations are quite clear to me now.

The number of participants used in the study is one of the limitations observed as it may have restricted the data's relevance since the sample was small. Further, it would have been beneficial to open the study to a more general population of Caribbean men, rather than focusing on men who had involvement with child welfare agencies. These men could have been located in barbershops, church dances, or community organizations.

The possibility of a larger sample may have included the mothers and children, as it would have been insightful into comparing how father's viewed themselves with that of their partners/wives and children. Further research may have been gained by also comparing ethnic groups in order to determine how worker's perceived African Caribbean fathers versus European Canadian fathers and their level of participation with their children. The question of discrimination and if the fathers believed that their race influenced any decisions made by child protection workers may have been one of the more directed questions, which I may have posed, given that there is an over representation of Black children in care of the Youth Protection system. The possibility for testing for racial bias and the barriers posed to working with fathers on the part of the children protection worker in the perceptions of the fathers may have been a good indicator for discrimination in these specific aspects. There is an abundance of literature (White, Courtney, Fifield, 1998) which speaks to the influence of race in child welfare.

### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

There is an abundance of information on working with fathers located on the information highway, but certainly not much on working with Black and minority ethnic fathers. Information is further limited when looking for information on Caribbean fathers as a specific category. Regardless of this limitation, there is work being conducted in Britain with Caribbean fathers and the efforts being made to break the stereotypes. This same work is being carried forward to the Caribbean (i.e. Trinidad and Jamaica) with fathers who are leading the way in facilitating the work. Positive as it is, challenges are being faced in areas of recruiting and funding, which would allow for a continuation of work with fathers (<http://www.reu.org.uk/projects/files/abu2.pdf>).

As a community it would be worthwhile to design programs which are culturally appropriate for fathers which are supportive and can meet their cultural needs. In interviewing

one of the fathers, who was asked to attend a parenting program, I was in awe that he was requested to engage in such a program which was clearly not culturally appropriate for him, given his heavy use of Patois in our interview.

There is the ability to “borrow” from these programs and to learn from them which could be an effective use in breaking stereotypes, supporting, and providing advice and supporting our fathers to effectively engage with their children.

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Appendix A:

Mr. John Liston  
Executive Director of the Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex  
1680 Oxford St. E  
London, Ontario  
N5V 4X7

Re: MSW Thesis Proposal

Dear Mr. Liston

As you are aware, I am currently completing my MSW degree at McMaster University. part of the requirement to complete the program is to write a thesis. The topic that I have chosen is "CaseWork Practice with African Caribbean Fathers-Missed Opportunities". During the time that I ran a group for Black Children In Care, it came to my attention that many of the children in the group were of mixed heritage and had fathers who were migrant workers from the Caribbean. Unfortunately, many of the children did not know their fathers and therefore engaged in fantasies about them. From this, I am assuming that the fathers were important to the children.

To help workers understand more about these children's fathers and to increase the likelihood of workers engaging with them, I am seeking to discover how these fathers perceive and construct the notion of fatherhood, and to explore the implications for Children Aid Society Workers who engage with them around their children's needs.

I am requesting your agency's assistance in regards to the recruitment process. I am requesting that the agency provide me with non-identifying demographic information about a number of cases where it is known that the fathers of these children are or have been migrant workers. I will then select four to five of these cases, and ask an agency representative to contact these fathers, asking if they would consider being involved in the research project. With the fathers agreement, the agency representative will then pass the names of these fathers to me and I will contact them and provide verbal and written information about the study.

Please find enclosed a copy of the thesis proposal, which has been approved by the Ethics Committee at McMaster University, as well as a copy of the Parent Information Letter and a Caregiver Consent form for you, providing me with permission to use CAS records. I would like to begin the interviewing process in the middle of April 2005, and therefore requesting a response from the Society, at your earliest convenience.

## Appendix B

### **Caregiver's Information Letter**

**Project Title:** Casework with African Caribbean Fathers: Best Practice or Missed opportunities?

**Investigator**

Colette Chapman  
McMaster University School of Social Work

**Supervisor**

Dr. Gary Dumbrill  
McMaster University, School of Social Work

Request to Participate in Research:

This letter is to inform you of research project which I am currently conducting . The purpose of the research is to speak with African Caribbean migrant fathers and to gain your understanding of what it means to be a father, and the implications for working with Children Aid Societies

Background and Information Letters:

As a social worker in child protection, I had the opportunity to provider services to families and their children, who were in the care of a Children's Aid Society (CAS), and with those who remained in their own home, and also via group work for Black children, who were in the care of the Society. From this group, children expressed knowledge around fathers who they had never met, yet who meant something to them.

I am seeking participants who are willing to share their perception and understanding of what being a father means to them. Further, this will also led to aiding CAS workers in integrating this knowledge into their own casework as there are implications for this. This is important because it is believe in social work, there is a bias against father involvement and participation in child welfare case planning.

Upon completion of this study, I would like to present the findings to the CAS and perhaps look at ways in which this understanding can be integrated into providing a more comprehensive service to fathers. Your participation in this project is essential for its

success, and your participation will be kept confidential. This means that I will not be permitted to discuss anything that a particular person has said without that persons permission. Every precaution will be taken to respect your privacy; all audio taped interviews and other data will be stored in a locked cabinet at McMaster University, except when being analyzed by me, at which time the data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home. All data will be destroyed two years after the completion of the research project. No identifying information will be included in any of the written reports of the research. All identifying information will be removed from the interview material and field notes.

I must inform you that there are situations in which, by law, I will not be able to keep the information that you provide to me as confidential: disclosure of child abuse, threats by people to harm themselves or others, or when required by court subpoena are some examples.

By participating in this study, you will be asked to meet with me for an initial interview of approximately one to two hours in duration. The interview may take place at a mutually agreed upon location. During the interview, you will be asked questions in regards to the circumstances of how you became involved with the CAS; your relationship with your child(ren); and your view on how you understand what a father means. The latter may be emotionally upsetting for you to recount, however, if this occurs, you may contact me at a phone number below and I will put you in touch with someone ( a counselor) who you may wish to follow up with.

You have the right to withdraw your participation in this study at any time, and if you chose to withdraw, all information which you provided will be destroyed.

Throughout the duration of this research, I would be pleased to answer any questions about the study. You may reach me at (519) 539-6176 ext 346.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. Should you have any questions about your participation in this research, you may contact the Board at (905) 525-9140 ext 24765.

Colette Chapman  
MSW Student  
McMaster University.

Appendix C

**Casework With African Caribbean Fathers:  
Best Practice or Missed Opportunities**

**Caregiver Consent Form**

I agree to take part in this study “ **Casework with African Caribbean Migrant Fathers: Best Practice or Missed Opportunities?**”. I understand that Colette Chapman of McMaster University is the principle investigator of this study, and that her actions in this capacity are being supervised by Gary Dumbrill (faculty member of the McMaster School of Social Work).

I am willing to take part in one interview that will last between one to two hours and am agreeable to having this interview audio taped and transcribed. I understand that I may decline to answer any particular questions. I also understand that I may contact the researcher to access information that I have provided. I have been fully informed about this study and I understand its purpose is to gain an understanding of how fatherhood is understood by African Caribbean fathers. As such, questions addressed by the researcher will be as follows: Where did you grow up; Who do you consider members of your family; How did you learn to be a father; Who did you learn this from?; What was your understanding of what being a father meant? How did your understanding of this fit with the reality of being a father?; Has your involvement with Children’s Aid affected your ability to be the type of father you wanted to be? I understand that there is the risk that I may become emotional or upset by discussing this experience of working with the CAS and that if this happens, you can put me in contact with someone (i.e counselor) that you may want to talk to further about this.

I understand that I can choose to withdraw from this study at any time, and that if I do, any information I have provided, including audiotapes or notes, will be destroyed.

I understand that confidentiality is assured, and that all dates will only be used by Colette Chapman, her supervisor (a McMaster University Professor). I have been informed that the tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at McMaster University, and when they are being analyzed off-site, they will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s

home-office. The tapes will be destroyed after two years and all transcripts will not have my name on them, or identify me in any way.

I have been assured that my participation in this research project is confidential, however, I understand that confidentiality cannot be maintained if I inform the researcher that a child under the age of sixteen is at risk of being harmed or sexually abused, or if I inform the researcher of someone who plans to harm themselves or others. I also understand that there is a remote possibility that interview transcripts could be subpoenaed for court proceedings. I understand that this risk will be reduced by my transcripts not containing my names, and any notes linking me to my transcripts and tapes being destroyed as soon as my interviews are complete or as soon as I indicate I wish this to take place.

I understand that at the completion of this study, the researcher will offer to meet with me to discuss the findings, and ensure that the information is presented in the manner that best represents the information that I have provided.

The decision to participate or not will have not have an effect on my relationship with the Children's Aid Society.

The project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board, and that participating with concerns or questions respecting their involvement in the study may contact

The McMaster Research Ethics Board Secreteriat  
C/P The Office Of The Research Ethics  
Telephone: 905-525-9140 ext 23142  
E-mail: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)

Should you have any further questions, I may be contacted at 519-539-6176 ext 346, or in the evening at 519-659-2173

Caregiver's Name:

Caregiver's Signature

Dated:

Witness Name:

Witness Signature:

Dated: