



6-2014

# African American muslim fathers and the factors that influence their notion of fatherhood

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## Recommended Citation

Hussein, Usama M., "African American muslim fathers and the factors that influence their notion of fatherhood" (2014). *College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Theses and Dissertations*. 158.  
<http://via.library.depaul.edu/etd/158>

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African American Muslim Fathers and the Factors that Influence Their Notion of  
Fatherhood

A Thesis  
Presented in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Art

March, 2014

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Background	7
3. Methods	30
4. Findings	35
• Family	39
• Religion	43
• Children	58
• Divorce	71
5. Conclusion	74
6. References	76
7. Appendix	82

Since the 1980s there has been an increased interest in fatherhood studies; however, there is little known about the diversity among African American fathers in the research literature. What is known has focused primarily on the deadbeat and the absent residential fathers. Few studies have appeared regarding African American custodial fathers (Coles 2010; Hamer and Marchioro 2002). However, they are overshadowed by researcher's continued interest in the absent father. This paper is an exploratory study of a group of African American fathers who are omitted from the attention of researchers: the African American Muslim father.

The study of African American Muslim fathers is important for several reasons: The first is the widespread Islamophobia<sup>1</sup> in America. Second is that most research on fatherhood has overlooked the significance of religion in the lives of fathers (King, 2003; Bartkowski and Xu, 2000). Martineau (2003) cogently stated, "The eloquence of institutions and records, in which the action of a nation is embodied and perpetuated, is more comprehensive and more faithful than that of any variety of individual voices" (p.7). Understanding the sources that Muslims

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<sup>1</sup> Islamophobia should not be understood as just a fear of the religion of Islam and Muslim,

claim to believe and to follow is a necessity for understanding Muslims' social interaction. In addition, it is equally important to understand the social environment in which the Muslim lives because of its relevance to his relationship with his children. Martineau's advice to researchers studying social groups that are different from their own can help explain how, if, or whether or not an African American Muslim father's behavior is representative of the religion he claims to believe. Perhaps a father's behavior is more reflective of other social factors. This also provides an opportunity to analyze the struggle that the African American male convert may have with transitioning away from the traditional European American notion of fatherhood, and a subjugated position of fatherhood to that of an Islamic ideal. The third reason is African American Muslims are an integral part of the African American community and must not continue to be ignored.

The purpose of this study is to centralize the voices of African American Muslim fathers. In this study, I will conduct interviews with sixteen Muslim fathers to explore the following research questions: 1) has Islam had any significant influence on these men's choice to marry and have children, 2) how has Islam influenced their relationships with their children, and 3) how has being African American and Muslim influenced these men's social identity as fathers. This study

departs from previous work in that it allows the fathers to reflect on their developing ideas about fatherhood. They are also encouraged to reflect on the role religion has played in the formation of their lives as fathers.

I will begin by providing important background information that is significant for analyzing African American Muslims' historical experience and transformation in America. The analysis shows how parental marital status and the relationship with one's father can influence children's choices into adulthood. The remainder of the paper is divided into several sections: religion, children, and divorce. These categories and their subsections evolved during the interviewing process. For example, in the earlier interviews some of the fathers indicated that there was room for improvement in how they fathered. As a result, an open-ended question was included in the following interviews that asked the fathers to highlight some of their shortcomings and what their children and wife or ex-wives would point out as their shortcomings.

There are three themes that emerged during the interview phrase: religion, children and divorce. The section on religious significance allows the fathers to discuss how religion has played a role vital in shaping their perception of fatherhood. The religious influence on these fathers is a reoccurring theme in the

other sections of this study. The section on children explores the impact of a new birth on the fathers' lives, the fathers' vision for their children's future, the type of activities they do with their children, and a discussion on what they perceive are their shortcomings as fathers. In the section regarding divorce some fathers explain how divorce has impacted their relationship with their children. These categories and their subsections provide insight into African American Muslim fathers. Also, these subsections have been given little attention in current fatherhood literature as they relate to African American fathers.

Because present studies of African American fathers do not provide an adequate model to comprehend the diversity that exists among this group of fathers, an alternative paradigm is religion and the role it plays in African American fathering. Through the lens of religion one can find a father that has not only been overlooked in the research literature, but can discover a father that is the complete opposite of other African America fathers discussed in that literature. This thesis cites religion as a viable paradigm to understand fatherhood in the African American community. Regardless of the father's educational level, social economic background, and family history, religion can provide an alternative image. Research has shown that religion is a vital motivational factor in father and child

relationships. Though it can provide valuable information it too can overlook those fathers who may profess a particular religion and not practice it. By using African American Muslim fathers the intention is to show that religion does impact the father-child relationship.

## BACKGROUND

### *Impact of Slavery*

The actual impact of slavery on the African American father is not as clear-cut as some scholars have argued. Most of what is known about the impact of slavery on this group of fathers is found in studies about the African American slave family. These studies are basically divided into two camps: the traditionalist and the revisionist perspectives. The traditionalist scholars tend to build on the works of sociologists Du Bois (1909) and Frazier (1939) who argued that the African traditional family was destroyed during slavery in the United States. While traditionalists have argued that African American slave men's role in the family was inconsequential, revisionists have argued the complete opposite. The major distinction between traditionalists and revisionists scholars is their position on the role of the African American husband and father during slavery.



Du Bois' study of the African American family was an effort to seek "social reform." According to Du Bois, the slave family existed in America without the rights granted to European Americans. He argued that marriage being a civil contract with legal rights granted to a man and woman to freely choose who they want to marry was not granted to the enslaved. Therefore the slave family was such that neither the father nor the mother had any legal rights to exercise, and no laws to protect them from any form of social injustice not even the natural right to protect their offspring from being taken away from them.

To show the consequences of life without legal protection Du Bois used advertisements of runaway slaves to show the actual impact slavery had on the African American family. The following is a sample of such advertisement, "\$20 Reward for my negro man Jim.- Jim is about 50 or 55 years of age. It is probable he will aim for Savannah, as he said he had children in that vicinity"(P.24). The other advertisements Du Bois used show the impact that selling slaves had on the slave family. There were children that ran away in search of their parents. Women ran away to find their children. Men and women ran away in search of their companions, who risked being thrashed or killed if caught. Although African Americans had no legal rights to protect the disruption of their families,

European American slave owners had the legal right to break up slave families if and when they chose regardless of its negative impact on the African American family unit.

Frazier (2009), used slave narratives to show the horrifying experience of the African American man and father's life on slave plantations. He argued that because of these limitations placed upon slave men by the institution of slavery, African American men had to live with a reality that they were completely powerless to determine their own destiny in life. The African American husband and fathers' meager power on the plantation only existed within the conditions allowed by the overseer and master. The slave master determined where African American men lived, worked, and whom they married. Frazier also argued that the slave system stratified slaves on plantations. The African Americans who had close interaction with the slave master and his family also assimilated many of their ways and attitudes. This relationship between the slave master and his family with house slaves created contention between the house and field slaves according to Frazier.

The revisionist scholars tend to build on the work of the historian Gutman (1976) who argued that the survival of African Americans during slavery was largely attributed to the slave family, which included a mother, father and their children. They argue, unlike Du Bois and Frazier, that the slave father played a significant role in the family unit. It appears that historians, such as Gutman and other "revisionists," as Patterson

(1998) refers to them, have attempted to minimize the actual impact of slavery on the African American family, as well as the African American father and child relationship. It is as if they were implying that American slavery was not a bad institution; however, according to revisionist slavery was not completely bad because slaves were able to maintain their families. This is a very strange assumption because the African slave family unit was broken up at anytime at the behest of the European slave owner. Although Gutman has argued that the break up of the slave family was rare, his data clearly shows that slave families were broken up, and were negatively impacted by the sale of family members.

Patterson (1998) has pointed out flaws in the revisionists' argument. He directs one's attention to a major issue that helps explain why so little attention has been paid to the impact of slavery on the African slave family, gender relationships, and African American father and child relationships. Patterson (1998) states the following:

For me, there are about two important flaws in the revisionists' literature on slavery. First is the revisionists' neglect or ignorance of the conceptual issues that their focus on the family as a unit posed for their work and findings. They compounded this flawed focus with their implicit assumption that what they called "the family" meant only one thing: The suburban, nuclear unit to which they were accustomed. With these assumptions, they then went in search of the thing they called "the family." Upon finding something that looked vaguely like "the family unit" to which they were accustomed, they

emerged triumphant with the academic news that slavery had had no damaging impact on the Afro-American family, that indeed the Afro-American had emerged from two and a half centuries of powerlessness, sexual degradation, male emasculation, childhood neglect, legal nonexistence, and general racist oppression with their nuclear families intact, their gender relations unsullied, and their communities tightly knit and harmonious (P.29).

Such critique of the revisionists' argument regarding the affect of slavery on African American men, women, and children provides a strong rationale for why most sociological studies on African American father and child relationships overlook historical structural factors. Historically, those factors (slavery, Jim Crowism, and historical racism) have for many decades reinforced certain behaviors and attitudes within a segment of the African American community towards marriage and the European notion of the "traditional family," a unit that consists of a legally married husband, wife, and their children.

For example, poor African Americans have historically developed adaptive strategies that allowed them to survive with minimal resources. A part of these strategies rest in how they have constructed the family unit. Stack et al., (1974) In their study of the African American family, have called attention to the role fictive kin and the importance of this relationship to the family unit. Stack has argued that to look at the African American family in light of the middle class Euro-

American family does not help to understand the complexities in the African American idea of family. The African American family under slavery argues Brenda Stevenson (1995) “differed profoundly from that of European Americans structurally and in ways in which family members functioned as contributors, administrators, and recipients of family resources”(p.29).

When the Muslim fathers in this study were asked, “have you always wanted to get married,” most answered yes. There were a few men who indicated an emphatic no. The men who stated no explained that they did not need the United States court system to validate their relationship with their partners. Strange as this may sound, these responses reflect a common attitude about marriage within the general African American community that should not be completely dismissed. It is possible that many researchers have overlooked a very important issue regarding many African American men and women’s attitudes towards marriage or rather a European American sanctioned marriage.

For researchers studying African American Muslim fathers, it is important that the researcher ask some pertinent questions; for example, what is the meaning of marriage and fatherhood for African American Muslim men? If one is looking at converts to Islam, he or she should seek to understand their notion of marriage

prior to conversion. Another important question is, what validates marriage for African American Muslims?

Prior to slavery, African Muslim husbands and fathers' roles were essential to the stability, security, and the continuation of African Muslim traditions and culture. The validation of the African Muslim man's family role was never based on a traditional European notion of family. There was no need for a European legal system to determine who an African Muslim man could or should marry, or the number of marriage partners he could have. Such choices for African Muslim men were rooted in the social reality of an African Islamic culture.

African Muslims who were forcefully brought to America went through traumatic experiences that immediately disrupted their cultural and religious traditions. The emotional and psychological trauma they endured was equally malicious as the physical. For example, Muslim men and women slaves being stripped of their clothing was significantly detrimental to their psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing. The idea of nakedness for African Muslims was completely different from that of their captors, enslavers and Africans belonging to

different religions and cultures<sup>2</sup>. Although nakedness is different for Muslim and non-Muslims, the fact that a European man could touch a Muslim woman's naked body where and when he pleased and display her nakedness in public must have had a devastating impact on both Muslim men and Muslim women. To reveal a Muslim woman's legs above the ankle and any part of her body below the neck is considered nakedness for Muslims. This may not be a significant indicator of a traumatic experience for historians and social sciences scholars who as Herskovits (1941) indicated promulgate the myth that "all Africans are from the jungle, primitive savages, ignorant of civilization, hold superstitious religious belief and no idea of morality" (p.23).

The trauma and affects of rape and other abuses on slave women are well documented. Jones et al., (1985) have shown that the European slave masters and overseers' sexual abuse of the African American slave woman evoked in the African American man a reminder of his powerlessness. Contemporary research on rape

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<sup>2</sup> See Qur'an chapter 24:30-1 and Chapter 7:26 which states, "Children of Adam, We have given you garments to cover your nakedness...". Also see *Islam Forbids Free Mixing of Men and Women* by Muhammad Iqbal Siddiqi. In this text Siddiqi (1984) uses primary and secondary Islamic sources to explain the importance of Muslim men and women covering their bodies. For example, "By Allah, it is better for me to be dropped from the skies and torn in two than that I should look at the private parts of another person or have them look at mine (p.81).

indicates that it impacts both the victim and her family. Why should the African (ie Muslim) women forcefully enslaved, raped, and physically and emotionally abused in America during slavery be any less traumatic than women assaulted and raped today?

The socialization of African Muslim children born into an African Islamic culture and environment was crucial for passing on language, customs and religious traditions from one generation to the next. The African children born to enslaved Muslim parents in America experienced a complete disruption of the traditional socialization of such cultural capital from being passed on to future generations.

Two important methods utilized for the transmission of African Muslim culture were reading and writing. The duration of African Muslims slavery determined the preservation of their own language and customs. Umar ibn Sa`id, an African Muslim enslaved in America, wrote in the introduction to his Arabic autobiography, *The Life of Omar Ibn Said*,<sup>3</sup> after over twenty years of enslavement he had forgotten most of his own language. He stated, “O Sheikh Hunter (Hanta) I cannot write my life, I have forgotten much of my talk as well as the talk of the

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<sup>3</sup> The first English translation of the text was done by Hon. Cotheal, Esq., 1848. Ala Alryyes 2011 is the most recent translation in which he provides an insightful discussion on the text



Maghreb. O my brother, do not blame me”(Alryyes 2011:59). What is unique about Umar’s honesty is that it reflects the actual impact of the institution of slavery on his ability to maintain command of both his indigenous African language and the Arabic language, the language of learning in his homeland during that time.

Jackson (2005) has argued that, white supremacy and the dehumanizing brutalities of American slavery combined with the historical negative image of Islam in European imagination which dates back from the First Crusade to Christopher Columbus’ choice to sail an alternative route to India placed African American Muslim slaves in a unique position that distinguished them from non-Muslim slaves. According to Jackson non-Muslim slaves had to contend with the stigma of skin color while the Muslim slaves had to contend with both skin color and the stigma of their religion (p.39). This made it impossible for Muslim slaves such as Umar to maintain the education level they learned prior to enslavement.

Witnessing the brutality demonstrated by the European slave masters must have weighed heavily upon Umar and other educated Muslim slaves. Such conditions made it difficult for them to educate succeeding generations about Islam in America.

Prophet Muhammad<sup>4</sup> encouraged Muslim men and women to seek knowledge. He inspired Muslims to seek knowledge even if it takes them as far as China. In Islam learning and teaching are religious obligations. Umar was clearly aware of his religious obligations when he chose to restrain from writing the religious texts and teaching them to the slave children in America. His withholding what he knew protected him and the slave children. To publically display characteristics of learning on some plantations could subject young Muslims to brutal beatings by the slave owner or overseer. The consequences of teaching were too great to take the chance; therefore, most African Muslim slave fathers were unable to teach reading, writing, religious traditions and the father's role in the family to their children. This is a clear indication of the structural forces, such as, the American legal system and plantation system impeding African Muslim cultural transmission.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ahmed ibn Zayn al-Habashi's *Risala Jami`* (i.e., Essentials of Islam) translated by Abdul Aziz Ahmed. The prophet Muhammad is reported to say, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim male and female." He is also reported to have said "Whoever takes a path searching for knowledge, Allah will lead him along a path to the Garden (i.e., Heaven)." These Prophetic reports are known by all Muslim students of Religious knowledge.

Each succeeding generation of African Muslims born into slavery exhibited less and less of their African Islamic cultural identity. The new African Muslim social identity evolved around the common experience of the exploitation of the general African body and labor for European economic power and benefit. The actual impact of slavery on future generations of African Muslims was the beginning of the formation of what has become today's African American culture. This culture evolved within an oppressed structural environment. It also developed strategies that gave life meaning under continuous economic, educational, and legal inequalities.

Prior to investigating African American Muslim fathers, an examination of historical social structures, and historical cultural forces is necessary. Learning these aspects will provide the knowledge needed to understand the historical formation and cultural shifts of African American Muslim men's evolving identities as fathers. Analyzing African American Muslim fathers outside of the powerful social forces that have contributed to who they are as fathers is not sufficient. But, how these men see themselves as fathers in the context of being African American and Muslim is relevant.

This study utilizes Wilson's (2009) definition of social structure and culture.

According to Wilson, "Social structures refers to the way social positions, social roles, and networks of social relationships are arranged in our institutions, such as the economy, polity, education, and organization of the family" (p.4). Wilson (2009) has defined culture as the following:

The sharing of outlooks and modes of behavior among individuals who face similar place-based circumstances (such as poor segregated neighborhoods) or has the same networks. Therefore, when individuals act according to their culture, they are following inclinations developed from their exposure to the particular traditions practices, and belief among those who live and interact in the same physical and social environment (P.4).

Cultural scholars have developed various methods intended to help them understand African American men's cultural identities. Although these studies exist, there are no serious scholarly investigations that examine how historical, structural or cultural forces have influenced African American men's identity as fathers and their relationships with their children. Dadsden and Smith (1994) and Page (1997) have argued that the dearth of literature on African American men and fathers appears to be based on negative representations in the local and national media rather than critical sociological investigation. Another disturbing characteristic regarding studies of African American men is the constant comparison of African American men to European American men. Such studies

ignore the historical factors that have shaped both groups of men's social identities as fathers. Hamer (1997) states the following about the development of the traditional European American idea of fatherhood:

.... the Western ideal of the good father has evolved out of the historical social and economic conditions of the Western White population. The Western ideal of fatherhood developed out of the patriarchal system founded on White men's ownership and control of property. Thus, fathers had status both in the public and private spheres. The wife and children's social and economic status in the community were tied to that of the husband and father. With industrialization, white fathers were more likely than were white mothers to have a higher education and to seek and obtain employment outside the home. The father's earnings were what sustained the family. He was the primary, if not sole provider. The wife and children's dependence on men enabled fathers to sustain a controlling and leadership role in the family. Overall, the ideal of fatherhood in Western society is founded on the past social, economic, and political realities of White men and women. (P.566)

An historical analysis of the development of the African American father and the African American Muslim father in particular in American developed a different notion of fatherhood from the European American idea of fatherhood. Connor and White (2003) have stated the following regarding African Americans' notion of fatherhood, "Since Black men have always been connected to two cultural arenas in America, African American and Euro-American, they are no doubt, influenced by dominant cultural definitions of fatherhood roles" (p.4).

The historical structural forces impact on African American Muslims' social identity cannot continue to be ignored. What follows is a discussion about African Muslims, African American Muslims, and fatherhood in Islam. Such discussion will provide background information that will allow for a better understanding of African American Muslim fathers' idea of fatherhood today, and the possible influences that have shaped that idea.

### ***African Muslims***

We know a great deal about the role that Islam has played in the life of African Muslims through historical African manuscripts and African American Muslim slave narratives such as the *Bilali Diary*<sup>5</sup>. Among these sources are those produced by West African Muslims in the many books they wrote, e.g. texts such as *Al-Sa`di's Ta`rikh al-Sudan* (Timbuktu & the Songhay Empire) by Abd al-Rahman al-Sa`di, which has been translated into English. This book provides an important glimpse into the Songhay Empire and the transmission of Islamic education and life in the famous city of Timbuktu. Many such books have survived today in manuscript form throughout West Africa in countries such as Mali, Nigeria, Ghana, and Mauritania.

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<sup>5</sup> For a critical review of the Bilali Diary see B.G. Martin's, *Sapelo Island's Arabic Document: The "Bilali Diary" in Context*.

There are also many manuscripts that are housed in European and American institutions of higher learning.

These manuscripts cover topics such as language with a particular focus on Arabic, grammar, rhetoric, reading (Qur`anic) and commentary, Hadith (Prophetic Traditions) Law, Principles of Jurisprudence, Theology, Logic, Mathematics, and various other disciplines. Blyden (1888) mentioned that there were known manuscripts of portions of Aristotle and Plato that were translated into Arabic and there was an Arabic version of Hippocrates which was extremely valued (p.206). Diouf (1998) in her work shows that European slave owners and overseers were aware of educated Muslim slaves. She states, "In the eyes of the slaveholders, the Muslims' literacy was dangerous because it represented a threat to the whites' intellectual domination and a refutation of the widely held belief that Africans were inherently inferior and incapable of intellectual pursuits" (p.108). It is of great significance to note Europeans were cognizant of the fact that many of the African Muslims were from communities in West Africa where education was an important part of their lives.

The African American slave narratives are another source for understanding the life of African Muslims prior to and during their enslavement. Slave narratives

can be classified into two basic categories: those narratives written by slaves during slavery and the Federal Writer's Project interviews of former slaves. Alryyes (2011) in his critical examination of the life of Umar ibn Said has provided a brief discussion of the differences that exists in the slave narratives. The first category of narratives were written by Africans who knew how to read and write prior to their enslavement in America, and those who learned to read and write in a European language in the Americas, and those Africans who already knew how to read and write in their own language prior to enslavement. The second category are the African Americans who learned how to read and write during their enslavement in America and those writing and Works Progress Administration interviews conducted with ex-slaves after emancipation. Bailey (1980) has provided an interesting discussion about how slave narratives have been used by historians such as Genovese, Gutman, and Blassingame and others. Historians and social scientists have used slave narratives to influence how we understand the life of the enslaved African American.

Umar ibn Sa`id, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, and Olaudah Equiano are just a few of the many African slaves who left behind biographies and other writings that provide valuable information about their lives in Africa (Turner 1997). These



slave narratives provide a glimpse into gender roles, the African Muslim father, and the role of religion in their lives. Equiano's and Baquaqua's biographies provide an interesting description of the community where they grew up in West Africa, the customs of their people, and they provided a glimpse into their life and families.

Among these African slaves as mentioned above were students and teachers from the various West African Islamic institutions like the famous Sankore University<sup>6</sup>. From the historical writings of West African Muslims' and the African slave narratives, we are able to explore how the lives of African Muslims enslaved in America were impacted and transformed by their experiences. For example, during slavery the African Muslim father's children were taken from him, fathers were denied any rights over their children, or any say about their children's behavior. According to Jones (1985) neither were these fathers able to protect their children and wives from the abuses of their European enslavers. These African Muslims tried to reconcile themselves with slavery in a new and strange land, how their social identity was reshaped in this new structural environment is equally important.

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<sup>6</sup> For a brief history of these Muslim Slaves see Allan D. Austins's, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles*.

## *The African American Muslim*

There are few African American Muslims today who can trace their ancestry back to African Muslim slaves. The interests of many African Americans to research their origin in Africa has led some to discover their Islamic roots. An example of this is the author Alex Haley. In an effort to find African Islam among African Americans, Ahmed (2011) journeyed to Sapleo Island off the coast of Georgia to discover how much of Islam has remained among the descendants of the slaves held there. What he found was the family of a well-known African Muslim slave, Bilali Muhammad,<sup>7</sup> who left behind a treatise of Islamic law he reproduced from memory.

Although there are a myriad of reasons why African Americans convert to Islam, all are in some way tied to slavery, and the social, and economic oppression they have experienced or witnessed in America. Dannin's (2002) explores the historical journey of African Americans to Islam. By discussing conversion narratives we learn, for instance, in the tumult of St. Louis, Missouri, Walter Gregg's life changed forever when he met a slightly, dark-skinned man who was attired impeccably in a starched collar, a striped bow tie, and a thick wool suit. A

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<sup>7</sup> B.G. Martin (1994) has done a critical review of a Diary written by Bilali. Allan Austin has also

turban swathed his head. From a street corner soapbox, he stared directly into Walter's eyes. "Come change your name, get back your original language and religion, and you won't be a nigger anymore" (p.239).

Another narrative is that of Ishan Bagby, an African American with a doctorate in Islamic studies. He explained that he turned to Islam in 1969 following the ghetto uprisings that swept the United States after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination the previous year (Dannin 202.239).

The above narratives provide an interesting glimpse into the rationale behind African American men's conversion to Islam. It also reveals the frustration of African Americans and their need to develop an identity that distinguishes them from European Americans. African American Muslim men come from various social, economic, educational, and class backgrounds; for example, there are professional athletes, politicians, scholars, taxi cab drivers just to name a few.

Any study of African American Muslim fathers must consider the historical experiences of African American men and the multiple notions of fatherhood that exists within their community. There are two primary sources from which the concept of fatherhood is developed for Muslims. One source is the Qur'an which is

the sacred book of the Muslims, and the other is *Sunnah* (i.e., the normative behavior and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).

### ***Fatherhood in Islam***

There is no single image of Fatherhood in Islam. What Islam does is provide basic principles and role models for fathers. For example, the Muslim father is considered the primary provider for his children and family. The Qur`an<sup>8</sup> states, “It is the responsibility of the father to provide them (i.e., his children) food and clothing properly<sup>9</sup>.” The Muslim father is to provide a healthy home to raise his children and he must also provide for their education. Another responsibility of the Muslim father is to teach morality to his children. The Prophet Muhammad stated: “No father can give a better gift to his children than excellent manners (1984:251).” In addition, to display love and affection for one’s children is a very important component to fatherhood in Islam. The above are only a few significant principles of fatherhood in Islam. The way a father carries out these principles may vary depending on economics, culture, or the country in which a Muslim lives.

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<sup>8</sup> Yusuf Ali Trans *The Holy Qur`an English translation of the meanings and commentary*. King Fahd Holy Qur`an Printing Complex, Saudi Arabia

<sup>9</sup> Quran 2:233

The ethnicity and culture of a Muslim father will determine certain characteristics that are unique to that particular group. For example, an African Muslim father initiates his son into adulthood with a ceremony when his son reaches a particular age or has his first nocturnal emission. Such ceremonies may not be practiced in non-African Muslim cultures. However, the Islamic ideal of fatherhood allows for these cultural variations.

Those things which are common among Muslim fathers are the sources for understanding the role of fatherhood: the Qur`an and the *Sunnah*. The two sources provide the father with numerous role models such as, the Prophets of Allah. They also provide numerous directives for children's rights upon their father. A couple examples of children's rights are: a child has the right to be loved, and a child has a right to know his or her father. A father's marital status does not negate his responsibilities to his children, nor does it allow him to reject the mandate of the Qur`an and the *Sunnah*. The Muslim father must provide for his children to the best of his ability. The best funds a father can provide for his children in Islam is that which is earned by his own hands. To accept unnecessary handouts to provide one's family needs is not encouraged in the Islamic sources. The Quran and the

Sunnah are sources that the Muslim father consults when he needs to understand how to fulfill certain aspects of his role.

The previous sections: African Muslims, African American Muslims, and Fatherhood in Islam allows us a means to examine the social life and fatherhood among African Muslim's prior to their enslavement in America by European. Examination of historical African Islamic sources and the African Muslim slave narratives allows us to analyze the affects that American institution of slavery, Jim Crowism and racism had on a father's identity and his ability to transmit his cultural tradition to his children. African Americans embracing Islam is an effort to reclaim their African Islamic heritage that was taken away during the enslavement of their forebearers. In Islam, understanding fatherhood allows us to comprehend the responsibilities of a Muslim father. In the analysis section I will show how Islam influences African American Muslim men's notion of fatherhood and how their notions shape their lives as fathers.

When a father leaves home, what happens to the father and son relationship? From whom does the son learn to be a man? Who prepares the son to be a husband and father? Social scientists have yet to answer these questions regarding the African American father and child relationship, and they haven't answered the vital

question of how these men come to define fatherhood for themselves. Eggebeen and Knoester (2001) argue that, “The significance of fatherhood may reside more in the level of engagement in that role than in the mere occupancy of that role”(p.385). The level of engagement of the biological father and father figures would determine how prepared a young African American man is to fulfill the role of husband and father.

How do we make sense of the present conditions that African American fathers face? Although traditionalist and revisionalist scholars have contributed to our knowledge of slavery’s impact on African Americans, they do not however provide much to help explain the present social forces that separates fathers from their children. And, neither do they help us understand the struggles that many African American fathers face trying to be present in their children’s lives.

To help us understand the social forces that are currently impacting African American fathers Orland Patterson, William Julius Wilson, and Manning Marable have provided critical analysis of both structural and cultural forces that have contributed to the present social conditions influencing African American life. According to Marable (2000) American capitalism is a key factor in under mining African American progress. He argues that many of the problems African Americans face today: racism, individualism, classism and sexism are all a result of

their embracing a capitalist economic system; a system that has led to deep-seated class divisions within the African American Community. According to Marable by investigating the historical development of America's capitalist democracy, where European American's wealth is created and transmitted to future generations one can also analyze how this system of success is rooted in the underdevelopment of the African American community.

Wilson (1987) has argued that the social forces that are presently having a negative impact on African American men and fathers are economic and a paucity of job opportunities. In Wilson's study he analyzes the decrease in jobs among African Americans from the 1950s to the 1990s. According to Wilson, 69 percent of African American men were employed in the 1950s- by the 1970s there were only 37 percent of African American men employed. Such loss of jobs, Wilson argues, are related to industries moving out of the inner city to suburbs, and companies even moving outside of the United States (Wilson 1987). This has made it difficult for African Americans who live in the inner city to get jobs to earn a living. And, it has significantly impacted African American family life.

Patterson (1989) unlike Marable and Wilson, argues that to understand the social forces that are presently impacting the African American community cannot



be understood without critically examining the impact of slavery on the African American man and woman. He contends that neither economic nor cultural explanations independently are sufficient to help us comprehend the problems in the African American community. According to Patterson African American men and women have transmitted from slavery to the present behaviors and views of each other that have contributed to many of the problems they now face.

## **METHODS**

This is a qualitative study based on the grounded theory approach. Because it does not begin with any particular theory that it seeks to substantiate, this approach allows for the use of fieldwork data to develop theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2011). To conceptualized the data collected for this study the life course perspective (Giele and Elder,1998; Elder, Nguyen, and Caspi 1997; Bruckner and Mayer, 1998) is used.

The data for this study come from personal interviews with African American Muslim fathers. Respondents were interviewed once. Several men were contacted for follow up questions to confirm the correct meaning of their response to some research questions. Interviews were approximately 45 to 90 minutes. All data was collected from October 2012 to January 2013. Interviews began by having respondents fill out a

demographic sheet<sup>10</sup> that contained all close-ended questions that asked their age, marital status, number of children, if they were born Muslim or were they converts to Islam, and how long had they been Muslims. Most of the interviews consisted of open-ended questions<sup>11</sup> designed to explore how African American Muslim fathers perceive their roles as fathers and their relationship with their children. Interviews took place in locations and at a time mutually agreed upon. Interviews occurred at the following places: respondent's home or my home, coffee shops, their place of employment, parking lot, and three interviews were conducted on the internet by way of Skype. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the primary researcher.

Sixteen Muslim fathers were recruited. To be a participant in this study, respondents had to fit the following criteria: African American, Sunni Muslim<sup>12</sup>, and must have children. The following issues were not of concern in the recruitment process: respondent's marital status, whether or not they lived at home with their children,

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<sup>10</sup> A copy of the demographic sheet has been placed in an Appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> A sample of the interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

<sup>12</sup> The choice of Sunni Muslims was based on Pew research data. The Pew Research Center 2007 report on Muslims in the United States reported that Sunni Muslims make up more than 50% of the Muslim population in America. It also indicated that Sunni Muslims also make up the largest group of Muslims worldwide. African American Muslims in general are mostly Sunni. Because of the size of the Sunni Muslim community in the United States, it was easier to locate members of that particular Muslim community.

custodial parent, economics status, educational level, and location of respondent's residences. The sample for this study is unique not only because it is based on interviews with African American Muslims men who have been omitted from research on fatherhood, but also because the most effective mean of recruitment was through the snowballing method. Although other techniques were organized to recruit men for this study, they all failed in gaining respondents.

The recruitment of African American Muslim fathers for this study was labor intensive. There was strong apprehension from many of the men. It is more than conjecture that such suspicions are associated with the Islamophobia that has become so widespread throughout the United States. Such trepidation is not misplaced when many innocent African American Muslims and Muslim immigrants have been arrested and held in detention for days, weeks and in some cases even years before being released by federal authorities without being charged for a crime. Hamer et al., (2001), shows the difficulties a researcher faces when recruiting African American men for research. She indicates that they are "notoriously difficult to access" (p.8). Hamer stressed that traditional recruitment strategies, public announcements, letters, and posting flyers did not bear any fruits. It was only through face-to-face contact that she was able to find recruits for her study.

Although she does not provide an explanation as to why the other techniques did not work, Huang and Coker et al., (2010), have indicated African American distrust of researchers, a lack of information and understanding of the study and a lack of recruitment efforts on the part of the researcher as possible explanations.

To recruit the men for this study, the following locations and strategies were used. Posting flyers and passing them out at Muslim places of worship, Muslim owned businesses, and other places where African American Muslims gather. There were public announcements, and face-to-face contact with Muslim men who fit the criteria for this study. The men in this study were all recruited in the Chicago land area. Three respondents were visiting the City of Chicago when they were recruited. Although most of the Muslim fathers approached as possible recruits refused to participate, a few were very helpful locating the men that did.

There are no assumptions that this sample is sufficient to make any generalizations about African American Muslim fathers or African American fathers in general. It does however provide possible ideas for future research on this group of fathers.

As stated, the recruits for this study are all African American Muslim fathers. Table 1 shows the demographics of the sample. Most 87 percent are converts to Islam. The average age at the time of conversion was 19. This is not much different than the 2007 Pew

Research findings that report that the average age of African American conversion is 21. The average age of recruits for this study is 41. In regard to their education 6.3 percent have less than a high school education more than 50 percent have some college with 37.5 completed at least a four-year college degree. At the time of this study 81.3 percent were employed full time, 6.3 percent part-time and 12 percent were unemployed.

Among the men 56 percent were married at the time of the interview, 25 percent have married since being interviewed, and (1) 6.3 are in a non-marital relationship with the mother of their children. Those men who married before conversion were 18.7 percent. 93 percent were not married until after their conversion. The men on average were 22.3 years old at the time of their first-born. All data is included in the following table.1:

**Table 1. Respondent's Demographic data**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Age</b>	41.0
at Conversion	19.3
at first Birth	22.3
<b>Education</b>	
Less Than High school	6.3%
High School	6.3%
Some College	50.0%
Finish College	37.5%
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	56.0%
Non-marital Relationship	6.3%
Number of Times Remarried	2.0
<b>Children</b>	
Before Conversion	0.5
After Conversion	2.1
Number of Children	3.1
<b>Conversion</b>	
Born Muslim	6.3%
Identify as Muslim	87.5%
<b>Employment</b>	
Unemployed	12.5%
Full Time	81.3%
Part Time	6.3%
<b>Married Before Conversion</b>	18.7%
<b>Married After Conversion</b>	93.8%
<b>Married Since Interview</b>	25.0%

## FINDINGS

Although the fathers in this study are Muslims, they are culturally African American and share similar social experiences as African American men in the general population. Both the men and their parents grew up in predominantly African American communities. This is where their views about society, family, social injustice, and their social identities were formed. How the parents of the men dealt with the influence of the larger social structures on their life is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it is important to understand how such social forces impact how they parent; and, how these parent transmitted their parenting skills to their children.

Overall, the factors that influence how these African American Muslim men father fell into two primary categories: Family which is divided into parent's marital status and relationship with father. The second is significance of religion, which is subdivided into the choice to marry, interaction with children, and divorce.

## FAMILY

### *Parent Marital Status*

Elder's (1977) argues, that when analyzing the family it is important not to ignore the historical conditions and the life history of individuals that make up the family unit. Considering individual life history provides valuable data, such as an individual's age at the time of marriage, education, family background, economic factors, marital compatibility and religious belief. These factors can help explain the success or failure of a marriage. Although this study is not about the marital status of the respondent's parents, one cannot ignore that there may be a connection between the marital status of one's parents and their notion of fatherhood and their own marital success or failure.

Although thirteen of the respondents' parents were married at the time of their birth, twelve of their parents divorced when they were young. There were only two of the men whose parents never married. It could not be deduced from any of the interviews that the parents' divorces were the result of economic problems. With the exception of two respondents, the rest of the respondents recalled that their fathers and even their stepfathers had jobs. The men were very much aware of their fathers' employment history.



One of the men, Malik, mentioned the actual reason for his parents' separation. His mother told him of the reason when he was older. He stated, "I said my father used to work at Ford Motor Company. My father had a very, very bad bout with addiction. At about the point I was six or seven he and my mother separated." Another respondent alluded to infidelity as the possible reason for his parents' divorce. The actual causes for divorces among these respondents' parents appear to be more about marital incompatibility rather than economic factors.

A casual glance at the respondent's marital status (see table 1 above) and that of their parents reflects a need for further analysis to determine if there is a true correlation between the parents' marital experience and that of the respondents.

### ***Relationship with father***

These Muslim fathers' conversion to Islam was an important stage in their lives. It has become a pivotal role in their self-assessment as African Americans, Muslims and fathers. It has led them to better understand the negative and positive influences of their biological fathers' affect in their lives as fathers. Hamer (2001) shows in her study of absent fathers that the men in her study adjust their fathering to the type of fathers they had. She states,

These fathers primarily based their idea of fatherhood on their past relationship with their own biological fathers. As children, most of these men grew up having noncustodial fathers. They based their role and function as father on what they felt their own fathers did or did not provide for them when they were children. Their role and function as a father was essentially founded on what they perceived they themselves needed from their fathers when they were children. (P.134)

The interviews with the men in this study support Hamer's findings. These Muslim fathers have mentioned everything from a lack of love from their fathers, to a lack of time spent with them, and their father's lack of interest in the things they were interested in. They did not want their children to experience what they did with their fathers. The Muslim fathers, whether or not they were divorced from the mother of their children, they wanted their children to know they loved them. All of the Muslim fathers stressed the importance of spending time with and showing interest in what interests their children.

A few of the Muslim fathers indicated that although they knew their fathers, it was they who initiated a relationship with their fathers and not the other way around. In future research on African American Muslim fathers' relationships with their children, it is necessary to include the interactions they previously experienced with their fathers. Although these Muslim fathers share a similar outlook as the men in Hamer's study, they differ however by not just trying to be

the type of fathers to their children that they did not have, but also trying to be the type of father Allah wants them to be. Juluis and other respondents stated they are trying to be the type of fathers Allah wants them to be. This is pertinent to understanding the religious influence on father and child relationship.

Anderson (1999) has provided an interesting analysis of the African American father in his description of the “decent daddy.” The decent daddy is a man, according to Anderson who operates on certain principles: He is an African American husband and father who believes it is his responsibility to provide for his family, to protect them, and to raise his son to be a depiction of himself. The decent daddy is also a man who believes he is entitled to certain privileges within his home. He considers himself the authority in his home. He is also a man who carries some respect within his community. Many of the African American Muslim respondents’ description of their fathers fit the decent daddy concept. Some of the respondents spoke of their fathers as very strong men with strong personalities and opinions of how a man should be. One respondent spoke of how his father would pick him up from his mother’s home only to take him to his office to sit there while his father worked. Although the decent daddy believes in the importance of work and taking care of one’s family, the decent daddy can also become more respected

outside of his home than he is within it. Many respondents in this study continue to have strained relationship with their fathers.

These Muslim fathers' family life experiences before conversion has had some effect on their choice to marry, their relationship with their children, and their social identity as fathers. In addition, religion now plays an important part in shaping these men's notion of fatherhood. In the following is analysis of how religion has influenced these men's decision to marry and father children. How has conversion to Islam challenged pre-conversion life experiences? And, how does a convert internalize an idea of fatherhood in Islam that differs from the ideas he had prior to his conversion? Those are two important questions. Although they are beyond the scope of this study, they are significant for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the African American Muslim evolving identity as fathers.

## RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Research studies on father's religious participation and the influence it has on a father and his children's relationship appear to exclude African American Muslim fathers. Why this has occurred is not of concern here. What is of interest is how

much this literature contributes to our understanding of the significance of religion in the lives of African American Muslim fathers and their notion of fatherhood.

There is empirical data that demonstrates that men who participate in a religious community are also more active in their children's life regardless of their residency (Cooksey and Craig 1998 ).

The Muslim fathers' religious faith significantly influences how they understand their role as fathers. Although these African American Muslim fathers vary in age, education, employment status and their personal development, Islam has absolutely impacted how they see themselves as fathers. When the men in this study were asked in what ways Islam has made them better African American fathers, Dawood responded:

Well, one, I have a role model which is the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). And it's fascinating because both of his sons passed away and only his daughters survived: (Umm Khutum, Ruqayyah, Zaynab and Fatima). So basically in the male culture he was raising these girls. That's a double example. So here he is raising daughters. For a while when his wife Kadijah passed away he was a single father. So you have him raising daughters then you have him raising daughters as a single father and then he remarries. You have real tangible examples of how to be a father.

Dawood looks to the life of the Prophet Muhammad in Fifth Century Arabia, a society where most Arabs saw the birth of a daughter as shameful, so much so that many Arab fathers buried their own biological daughters alive. The Qur'an

makes reference to this period: “When news is brought to one of them of the birth of a female child, his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief. With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had? Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on.”<sup>13</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad was inveighed against for not having a son. To have a son was considered an extension of the Arab’s idea of manhood. And men who only had daughters were considered somewhat weak in this pre-Islamic society. The Prophet Muhammad’s relationships with his daughters also played a significant role in influencing Muslims fathers’ relationship with their daughters during the milieu of the Prophet Muhammad and today in the lives of African American Muslim fathers. Another Muslim father, Malik, stated the following about how Islam makes him a better father.

I think that what Islam has done for me in my life generally, Islam has just made me much more conscious about my behavior so that as I engage any activity, there is this running dialogue between myself and myself – I could have done that better, why did I do that? Islam has given me the gift of introspection. Why did I do that? Why did I act that way? My daughter is merely trying to be warmth to me, why am I being so dismissive? I think if I would really locate one central way in which Islam has made me a better father is that I am more attentive to my daughter because I’m

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter 16:58-59

more attentive to myself. I'm more attentive to the way I feel. I'm more present. I'm more conscious. I'm more aware. Muhammad that was his own daughter just someone who certainly had more responsibility than me and who was also unquestionably manly, but still able to have this very tender and loving relationship with his daughter spoke very deeply and resonated very soundly with me about.

Malik and Dawood only have daughters. Both looked to the Prophet Muhammad's relationship with his daughters as an example for how to raise their own daughters. For many of these fathers, the example of Prophet Muhammad as a father provides them with the knowledge they lack, a knowledge that they had not received from their biological fathers, or from the other men in their lives. Another important influence on these fathers with daughters is a saying from the Prophet which states, "if anyone has a female child and does not bury her alive, or slight her, or prefer his other children (i.e., males) to her Allah will bring him into Paradise."

According to King (2003), "Understanding what motivates fathers to become involved in their children's lives is of particular importance"(p.382). A neglected motivational factor with implications for father-child relationships is the influence of religion and ties to a religious community of faith." Although King's primary focus in her article was Protestant and Catholic Christians, the interviews with the Muslim fathers for this study clearly supports King's argument that religious

participation is a motivational factor in these father's relationship with their children.

Although King considered Muslim fathers as too small of a group to analyze, this should not mean that African American Muslim fathers be ignored in research studies regarding the significance of religion on this group of fathers' relationships with their children. As noted in the statements of the fathers above, religion has made a significant impact on their lives. It influenced their choice to marry as well as their fatherhood choices. Although further research on religious influence is needed to advance our understanding of how religion affects African American fathers' idea of fatherhood, one cannot ignore the level of a father's religiosity in an analysis of its impact.

Saleek stated that Islam made him a better father. "It has directed and shifted my train of thought as far as being a maintainer, provider and comforter. Islam pushes you. It challenges you to bring out the best in you" (Field notes). Prior to conversion, Saleek's perception of fatherhood was similar to that of many African American men found in studies such as Anderson's (1999) *Code of the Street*. The streets dictated his standard of conduct. He saw marriage and family as something that restricted his freedom. He saw women as objects not to be trusted. It was the



streets that gave him real meaning in life. After accepting Islam, Saleek's perceptions about his role as a father changed.

The fathers during the interviews spoke about the importance of being protectors, providers, role models and being there for their children when needed. The association of these fathers with other Muslim married couples also reinforces their relationship with their own children. Another Muslim father Shakur discussed the influence of Islam in his life.

Before [Islam] I did not value life, I did not value life and I did not value other peoples' life. That's why I could be drinking alcohol, shoot people, shot guns, without a word or anything. But now as a Muslim I wouldn't do that to myself. I value life and value peace.

For Saleek and Shakur, Islam made them better African American fathers because it compelled them to value and respect life. Therefore, Islam laid the foundation for them to care for their own biological children. Such shifts in the attitudes and values of these Muslim fathers are the result of religious influences on their thinking, and behavior. The religious teachings and values emphasized in the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad encourages the centrality of family life. According to King (2003), "religion is also important for positive family relationships (including spending time with children), and a focus on the concerns

and needs of others over the self” (p.384). Another respondent Khalil stated how

Islam makes him a better father:

Well, it starts off with you taking care of your responsibilities for your Iman<sup>14</sup>. And if you take care of all the responsibilities for your Iman then you have all these other responsibilities that have to be taken care of. So you start feeling, hey I have first my responsibilities as far as Allah is concerned and then I have these family responsibilities to take care of.... But how Islam influenced me was that you know - because Islam is always talking about you responding. It's talking about you responding to the hierarchy of things and Allah being the top, then your family, then your relatives and then your community.

Khalil goes on to indicate his Imam's<sup>15</sup> (i.e. religious teacher) teaching is what influenced his attitude regarding his religious and familial responsibilities.

For the fathers in this study, a lack of economic resources and being a non-resident father are not excuses for not being active in their children's lives. It is a religious obligation to be responsible for you children these fathers stated. For African American Muslim fathers, it is the life example of the Prophet Muhammad and religious teachings in their Holy book that binds Muslim fathers with their children. According to Wilcox's (2002) research, “religious participation” influences father's “behavior and values” (p.788 ). He continues, “parents who participate in.... activities are more likely to value obedience in their children than other parents.

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<sup>14</sup> The word Iman in this context refer to one's faith

<sup>15</sup> The word Imam as used by Khalil refers to the leader of a national Muslim community.

Parents who attend.... are more likely to be involved with their children's education." This was the case with all the Muslims fathers in this study. Upon observation, all the African American Muslim fathers were active in their own local religious communities. A future study regarding religiousness on African American Muslim father's idea of fatherhood and their interaction with their children is important.

### *Choice to Marry*

Marriage in Islam is an important social and religious duty that is strongly encouraged. It is forbidden to have sexual relations outside of marriage. Islam considers marriage the foundation for procreation and Islamic socialization.

The majority of the African American Muslim men in this study were somewhat perplexed about the idea of marriage before converting to Islam. Although most of them thought about marriage prior to conversion, they were confused about how a marriage should work. The few respondents who actually thought about marriage before their conversion did not recall ever considering the type of woman they wanted as a wife. They were also unclear about the roles of a husband and father. Many of the men indicated they did not receive the guidance needed to fulfill these roles within their respective families. It

was only after conversion to Islam that they began to seriously consider the importance of marriage and fathering.

It is clear that for many of the respondents, Dawood is one of the few men who thought about marriage before conversion. He replies:

Yes, there was always the romantic notion about being married. You know a lot of TV was influencing our images, our ideas rather of what marriage was. You see these marriages on TV. I remember an episode of Bonanza when either Adam or one of the brothers got married. Then I also remember the marriage of Kunta Kinte in Roots which made a big impression on me. I went to some weddings when I was a kid, so I knew that that was left out and the day-to-day maintaining of it.

Another respondent Malik stated:

To be honest with you, I always wanted to get married. Marriage was always something I longed for because of my mother, God bless her, was always very cautious about bringing men around my sister and I. Even to date I've only seen my mother involved with three men. I'm 30. I've only seen my mother involved with three men my father and two other men. I've always wanted to know what that domestic, harmony and tranquility felt like because my own father wasn't there. I remember looking at the Cosby show thinking Bill was just a dad. Even now when I watch the Cosby Show I can get teary eyed. It looks not perfect but idealistic.

The men who thought about getting married before their conversion all spoke about the influences of television shows on their idea of marriage and family. Most indicated shows like the Cosby, Bonanza, The Rifleman, Big Valley, and The Waltons as being major influences. One respondent implied cartoon families, such

as the Flintstones, The Jetsons, and The Jackson Five, just to name a few were his influences. Given the above answers, one must consider the type of influences today's popular television shows have on the audience's perceptions of family and their roles. What is clear, based on these men's responses is that media had a major influence on their idea of marriage prior to their conversion to Islam. Their families appear to have had little direct influence on their choice to marry.

As for the respondents that did not think about marriage prior to conversion, religion seems to be the main factor for their changed attitude. Those men who did not want to get married before their conversion were very specific about their attitudes about marriage. When Saleek responded to the question: "Did you think about getting married before converting to Islam?" He did not blink. There was no forethought. His answer was an absolute "No." Unlike some of the other fathers, Saleek grew up in a home with his father present. Julius, another respondent stated, "No, No!" to the marriage question. Unlike Saleek, Julius' mother and father separated when he was young. He and his siblings lived with their father after the separation. His father, due to work, put Julius and his brother and sister under the care of his own parents.

Although Saleek and Julius never wanted to get married prior to conversion, both do not share a common family experience. However, there are two things these men do share: one is they were both in relationships and had children prior to conversion. And, two they only considered the idea of marriage after their conversion.

While the concern over the association between poverty and family structure has led policymakers and researchers to examine the economic and social changes related to the growth in the number of single-mother families (Mark Testa, Nan Marie Astone, Marilyn Krogh and Kathryn M. Neckerman; 1989), no attention has been given to how the active participation in religion has actually affected African American Muslim men and women's choices to get married. Although we know that religion influences a father's relationship with his children, what do we really know about their religious participation and how it affects their choice to marry? The Muslim respondents' in this study all indicated that Islam was crucial in their choice to marry when they did. This is the case regardless of their thoughts about marriage before their conversion. The respondent's idea about marriage before conversion is similar to that of other African American men in fatherhood literature. Many saw marriage as something that would not allow them to hang out with their friends. Wilson (2003) wrote that, "The men in the inner city

generally tend to feel that it is much better for all parties to remain in a non-marital relationship until the relationship dissolves rather than to get married and then have to divorce” (p.15).

Although the majority of the men in this study did not marry until after becoming Muslims, the interviews suggest that Islam also influenced their choice of a wife. What appears most important for their choice of a wife is that she is Muslim. However, Islam encourages Muslims to marry actively religious persons. Therefore, knowing a possible spouse’s character and temperament is equally important as knowing their religious affiliation. There is a possibility that their lack of religious knowledge combined with lack of guidance from their biological father left some of them ill prepared to choose a compatible spouse.

### ***The Birth of Children:***

With the exception of three fathers the majority of the respondents were Muslims at the time their first child was born. The fathers that had children prior to their conversion to Islam indicated that they were gratified at the news that they were to be fathers. This happiness had nothing to do with these men wanting to fulfill the role of a father. They had no interest in fathering during that time in their lives. It was after converting to Islam that this group of men began to embrace the idea of fulfilling the role of a father. The most important influence of conversion on these

African American Muslim fathers was that Islam assured their presence in the lives of their children's regardless of the fathers' marital status. For those men who had children prior to conversion, Islam inspired them to develop relationships with those children they had prior to conversion and become active in their lives.

These Muslim fathers all spoke about how they saw their children as gifts from Allah. All of the fathers indicated not only how having children changed their lives, but they also indicated how Islam engendered a sense of responsibility to their children, and how it challenged them to be men. Islam's influence on these African America Muslim fathers is clear from their interviews. The men were asked how they felt when their wives told them that they were pregnant and what their thoughts were at the news. Shafi`a stated the following:

Oh, damn, damn, damn (slight laughter). My first thought. We were about to get, I was about to send her back to her mother. I remember coming into the house and then she handed me a sheet of paper. She was on the bed and I laid down next to her. She said here read this, and I took the paper. I read it and I said, "ah, heck no." Like I said damn, now I've got to keep this woman. I can't leave now. I've got to start treating her better. Then I started, then when I found out it was a boy, I was really excited and was really looking forward to having this baby. I can honestly say that I watched all of my kids come into this world. That's when I actually. I'm always an active participant at birth even though I never planned for any of my children. I never planned for any of them, but when they came I was the happiest man in the world.



After graduating from an Illinois State university with a degree in Political Science, Shafi`a decided to get married, and soon thereafter set out to study Islamic law in the Middle East. Shafi`a and his wife were living in the Middle East studying when he learned that he was going to be a father. Although he converted to the religion of Islam, Shafi`a wife was born into an African American Muslim family.

The following two fathers described their thoughts and feeling on the news of their wives' pregnancy. For example, Khalifa shared his thoughts:

It made me very, very, very happy, very happy that I got something to leave behind. I have a legacy. I have something or someone that I can give everything that I have known, everything that I have. I can give to them a part of me, a part of my character a part of what I am. Everything I can leave to them and give to them something to carry on. It made me feel like I was doing my part on the planet.

Malik stated

We were just about to book the tickets [He and wife were on there way to the Middle East to study Islamic law] because I had the money and then my wife tells me she's pregnant. I was crushed. I paid attention in health class, but it shouldn't have been a surprise to me that she could be pregnant, but it just wasn't a part of the plan. It wasn't a part of the plan. My reaction was, what are we going to do? What does this mean for the plan that I had just recently put together and then started working toward.

Religious fathers like Shafi`a and other men in this study, university educated and professionally employed African American men are completely overlooked in research studies on African American fathers. Petts (2007) has argued that men who are religious prior to the birth of their children are more likely to be

engaged in their children lives. Although Petts has shown that religion does have some influence on a father's relationship with his children at birth and after, his research appears to claim that Christians are more engaged in the life of their children than non-Christians.

The data collected in this study clearly indicates that these Muslim fathers were just as concerned with their children at the time of their birth as European American Christians fathers. They are equally concerned with their children's lives and futures. As indicated by Shafi`a, the news of his wife's pregnancy forced him to reconsider separating from her. Shafi`a and Malik were both in the process of making life changing decisions when their wives informed that that they were pregnant. Yet, rather than just abandon their wife and children for their own selfish interests these Muslim fathers found ways to keep their families together and be present in the life of their children. It appears that research on African American fathers has failed to investigate fathers such as Shafi` and Malik, men whose fathers were absent from their lives and know first hand what it is like not to have a father present. The African American Muslim Men, in this study were mindful of the negative images of African American men in society and chose not to engage in the proliferation of those images.

This section shows the need for future studies on religious devotion and its impact of African American fathers. There is a significant stereotypical reduction regarding African American fathers if the utilization of religion is included in research.

### *Interaction with Children*

The few studies on African Americans fathers do not delineate the diversity that exists among them. African American fathers who live in the inner city and are low-income are usually the primary focus. Most of these studies depict African American fathers who do not live at home with their children as deadbeat dads, irresponsible, and sperm donors. Since African American Muslim fathers are part of the African American community, they are also viewed through the same prism. Some scholars have argued against such generalizations regarding African American fathers.

Not all African American Muslim fathers are responsible fathers. This study is not an attempt to hide such fathers or to provide an excuse for them. Dannin (2002) provides ample evidence of Muslim fathers who have neglected their children. This section focuses on four aspects of African American Muslim fathers and their children: a father's role in the life of his children, the type of activities he

engages with his children, his vision for his children, and his perception of his own shortcomings.

### ***Role in Children's lives***

An African American Muslim father's understanding of his role and responsibilities as a father can be examined based on two stages, pre-conversion influences and post-conversion influences. The first allows us to examine a father's life before accepting Islam. This will help us understand important life events and other influences that may have played a role in shaping his notion of fatherhood. The second allows us to examine how Islam impacted those previously held notions. Therefore, understanding both stages is important. It is equally important to know his communal religious affiliation. Both pre-conversion influences and post-conversion influences on African American Muslim father's role as a father can be completely different. The following are examples of pre-conversion influences.

Saleek explained his experiences.

Part of it was, I guess I picked up the part about working every day. My father did show me that. I did see him work every day. And in spite of him working every day, he did come home and cook food for us and clean up the house. That's where I got things from. The man not only works, but he comes home and pitches in and cleans the house also and cooks for everybody.

Saleek goes on to say: “He (his father) didn’t give me the hands-on training I needed to show me this is how you do things – this is how you do this or this is how you do this. As far as teaching me how to be a man he didn’t have that.”

Saleek did learn valuable lessons from his father’s presence in the home. He observed his father going to work every day. He knew that his father paid all the bills at home. And he was also aware that it was his father who provided for the family. Because his father worked a lot, there was very little social interaction between them. Therefore, Saleek received no direct lessons from his father that would have prepared him for fatherhood. Neither could he depend on his father to give him advice about marriage. There were no other men in his family that helped prepare him for being a father.

Mustapha another father had a different experience.

So those were my – that was my perception of what a father should be and his relationship with his children. So, you know my thoughts on fatherhood were like a father is responsible. He’s cool. He provides for his children and talks to them. He loves his children and doesn’t look at them as a burden...It was like I can’t wait to have children because I want to do this with them. We’re gonna do this. It was like totally different, and that’s the relationship I have with my children.

Mustapha’s mother and father divorced when he was young. Nevertheless, he spent a great deal of quality time with his father. When he had problems with his

marriage or his children, he sought advice from his father. For many of the Muslim fathers, few were able to discuss a healthy and complete relationship with their fathers.

Mustapha also provides an example of post-conversion influence when he expresses how his acceptance of Islam complemented his own relationship with his children and the many things learned from his father. He stated, “I think Allah gave me what I wanted because of how I saw the relationship [i.e. with kids] being. I saw my children as being a blessing and a benefit. We have a wonderful camaraderie.”

Another respondent, Shahed, stressed that he didn't have a father. His father was incarcerated most of his life. When his father was released from prison, their relationship was not that of a father and son. Their relationship was more like street buddies. He states, “It's [Islam] that give me instruction because I didn't have a father and didn't know what the criterion of a father was.” While Shahed's mother attended College his grandparent raised him. Although he learned valuable lessons from his grandfather about being a man, he was never really prepared to be a father. His learning about the role of a father came from his close association with his Muslim friends whom he watched how they interacted with their children. After

he had children, he would go his religious brothers who were knowledgeable about the religion to get advise.

Another respondent, Shafi`a discussed the impact of Islam on his understanding of fatherhood.

I would say I'm a lot more morally conscious, and I guess you would say that putting God first now with everything I do and understanding that the child is God's creation. Looking at it that way – understanding what we've understood by the text that we have received from the traditions of Prophet Muhammad...., reading verses of the Koran - things like that, things that help protect a child, things like that help protect your family. You find yourself reciting these things for different.... in order to protect the family. You just become a little more overly protective. Any father is protective, but I think that as a Muslim I am overly protective because I - my children growing up as Muslims in this country, you know in a non-Muslim environment. Now how are we going to deal with that? those kinds of things – trying to help them understand vanity without.... who they are – losing them too if you know what I mean.

Various influences have shaped how the men in this study have grasped their role as fathers. These African American Muslim fathers believe that being a provider, protector, teacher, and disciplinarian is crucial to their role as a Muslim father. Most of them understood this prior to their conversion. However, it was only after their conversion that many of the fathers found fulfilling these roles significant to their Muslim identity.

For these fathers, to be a provider and protector is not just about providing financial support and providing a safe environment for their children. These fathers

see their children as a trust from Allah. Julius, one of the respondents stated the following about this trust, “Allah gives children as a form of a trust. He sent them into the world a particular way, and our job is to try to the best of our ability to keep them in accord with that nature.” This trust that Julius spoke of is best described, as the essence of human nature, which he and the other fathers believe, is submissive. The primary focus of submission is to Allah alone, and not to socially constructed influences. In addition, the fathers believe that Allah is going to hold them accountable on the day-of-judgment for how they treated this trust. All the men believe this trust as serious. Being a resident or non-resident father did not matter. Their children have the right to be loved, the right to have respectful parents, and the right to be reminded of Allah and His Prophet Muhammad. The Muslim father’s job to protect his children is associated with their belief in Allah.

### ***Activities with Children***

A father’s activities with his children provide a glimpse into his idea of fatherhood. Activities here refer to a father’s face-to-face interaction with his children such as helping them with homework, playing board games, or having discussions etc. Such interaction is a means to transmit important life skills from a father to his children. For example, Dawood talked about his involvement with his daughter’s activities:



My daughter is in Kung Fu once a week. What don't we do together? We go to the library a lot. In the summertime we're always outside playing sports. I expose her to my friends. We go to the movies. We go to the girls' basketball games and girls' volleyball games anything I can expose her to I expose her to. And, then we spend a lot of time together doing homework. I try to teach her. We play chess together. We play Uno together. We went trick or treating last night together. I go to all of her functions because she is in the choir at school, and she's also involved in other activities at school any and everything. I'm in martial arts also so I brought her to some of my tournaments. She's comes to some of my adult promotion tests. She comes when I work out. We're always out and about.

Shafi`a talked about his children

We play a lot of card games like spoons, Uno, dominoes. Sometimes we play hide and seek. Sometimes I start closing my eyes and grunting like Frankenstein and start chasing after them. I got a little thing I call spider love. All that really is - I start singing spider love and start tickling them like a spider because they hate being tickled.

When asked to describe a typical day with the children Shafi`a stated:

Let's say on the weekend because otherwise I'm at work. I get up first before everybody, go to the store, run errands, come home and make a big breakfast. After we have a big breakfast, we might play some games. We may watch a movie or play video games with the boys. The girls are doing hair stuff and playing Barbies, or we might go to the park, or we might go to the zoo. There are three different parks – a water park by my house. In the other park we might just walk around or maybe throw frisbees or fly kites. The boys always bring a ball so I'll kick the ball around with them. Then we get into the slides and monkey bars.

In addition to these two fathers, other fathers in the study participate in their children's activities. Divorce did not prevent these African American fathers from creating activities with their children or being involved in their lives. Although a couple of them were laid off at the time of the interviews, their activities with their children appear

to be determined by the children's age and financial resources. For example, Abdul Khafir, a father who was laid off at the time of the interview, informed me that he took advantage of free days at Chicago museums and storytelling day and children films at libraries throughout the city. Abdul Khafir's children are one and four years of age. Those fathers who live at home spend more time with their children and did more activities with them. For example, they spoke more about homework, driving the kids to school, and educating them in religious devotion.

A couple of the fathers believed that it was their wives' job to help their children with homework, cook, and clean the house. Such attitudes appear to have no foundation in Islam. Although these Africa American Muslim fathers believed that the prophet Muhammad is a role model for fatherhood, their perception of gender roles has more to do with their life experience before accepting Islam than it does with Islam itself. Educating children in Islam is equally the responsibility of both parents.

It would be easy to conclude that the reason the fathers who do not help their children with homework is due to their own lack of education. However, this is not the case because he is has a university education and teaches children as a profession. So, the question should be, where did this type of thinking come from

when all the other Muslim fathers help their children with homework? Neither is a lack of a father's education, nor Islam relevant to such attitudes. Divorce did not prevent these African American fathers from sharing activities with their children or being involved in their lives.

### ***Father's vision for their Children***

What Muslim fathers want for their children says a lot about their relationships and their ideas of fathering. When the fathers were asked to share their vision for their children, the intention was to examine the following three aspects: How observant are these fathers of their children's unique talents and characteristics? How do they help their children develop their talents? And, to explore how they negotiate what they see in their children with their own ability to provide the necessary tools to cultivate the children talents. Shaheed stated the following:

Obviously I want the best like any father or parent wants for their child. W.E.B. DuBois said something that I read in one of his books that kinda stuck with me. He said, Let the farmers be farmers, let the workers be workers, let the scholars be scholars – not necessarily word for word, but to this extent that everybody is made for something... I don't know what is right for him, but I want to broaden his avenue. I want to put him in things that will open doors for him.

Shaheed goes on to say, "Umm, right now my son is a leader because everything I teach him, or anything he learns about al-Islam he automatically

teaches it to all of his siblings whether they're older or younger." Shaheed's son is eight years old. He says the following about his daughter, "My daughter, she learns fast. I don't know if it's because of her age, but she picks up things fast." Shaheed indicated that he wants to do his best to keep his children in an environment where they could learn new things. Most important he spoke about having his children around beneficial knowledge. Knowledge that will help them become better Muslims and whatever they choose to be in life.

Malik expressed his thoughts about his daughter:

My daughter...I want her to be...It's really interesting to say man because I'm watching my daughter now. And one of the things I feel really passionate about is as a parent it is my job to shepherd my daughter and lead her. It's kind of like I don't expect her to make informed and intelligent decisions about the most fundamental questions in her life like what I want to be when I grow up. But, at the same time I'd like to help her move into the paths that are most consistent with what I recognize as her talents. My daughter seems very engaging. She's very outgoing. She likes to talk. She likes people. I'm thinking something within the performing arts or journalism. It just seems like this is kind of what I see in her now as a child. However, that's what I think and that's what I see.

Shafi`a

I'm making my daughter become a dentist. I'm gonna make my son – my son talked about he wants to get into architecture, so I'm gonna make sure he starts getting into that, even though he likes soccer. He wants to be a professional soccer player. I tried to set some things up for that to happen, but because the way his mother operated that just went for not. But, when he gets back into the states I'm gonna try and really push hard for him to get

into some architectural camps, get him involved in a school that can help him realize that dream. I'm trying to get my oldest daughter to understand that you gotta be – you need a profession that you can take anywhere you want. Their mother is a nurse. She's working in a hospital in Kuwait as we speak, so a skill that can transfer anywhere in the world. I told her you know that I never heard of an out-of-work dentist so you need to think about dentistry. She came and told me, I think I want to be a lawyer. That's cool but you've got to be serious about that.

Shaheed lives at home with his children. Malik is a custodial father whose wife died during childbirth, and Shafi`a divorced his first and has recently remarried since the interview. The other men in this study are similar to Shaheed, Malik, and Shafi`a. They all pay attention to their children talents, and they are all concerned about their children's future.

Although the Muslim fathers are concerned with their children's commitment to their religion, these fathers are also concerned with their education, being productive human beings, and their happiness. Although the majority of the fathers wanted their children to be in a profession that they personally desire, these fathers were very aware that their children might choose careers other than the ones they want for them. They all appear ready to accept this reality when and if it happens.

Although Shafi`a wants to urge his daughter to be a dentist, his primary concern for her career has a great deal to do with her becoming a distinguished

African American woman. He wants his daughter to be independent and have her own career. He does not want her to depend on a man for the welfare of her children if she happens to get divorced.

### ***Fathers Shortcomings***

Another important area of concern was how reflective these fathers were regarding their own shortcomings. In addition, were they sensitive to what their children thought were their shortcomings? Mustapha responded:

I would say my biggest shortcoming that is not having patience because like when having my children I was working. So a lot of times basically from 8 to 5 or 8 to 6 I was gone. The short time I had to spend with them was not like something that was pressing.

Shafi`a discussed his shortcomings

Our dad (stating what his children would say about him) has no sense of embarrassment because I'll holler at my kids in the grocery store. I have no problem getting loud with them in the grocery store. They'd probably say I'm too hard on them because... I get frustrated real quick. That's a shortcoming. I get frustrated real quick when I'm trying to teach them something. It's like – and that bothers me and my mood changes real fast, split second.

Malik stated the following about his shortcomings,

As a father to be honest I suffer some serious deficiencies. I have a very difficult time with my daughter's emotional dependence on me. So when my daughter has this emotional dependence on me – daddy make me happy- it make me uncomfortable and I think my behavior would suggest that you can't depend on anybody like, not even me. I think sometimes I have a very difficult time making my daughter feel important to me. There is nothing more important to me than you. So if I'm working translating I'm okay, okay.

If I'm with her I'm always on the phone – never really indulging her in a way that would indicate that there's nothing more important than you are. When I look at the fact that I don't do that as readily as I should or as naturally as I should, I really recognize these are some deficiencies in my parenthood approach as a custodian father.

These Muslim fathers reported what they perceived as their individual shortcomings and what they think their children would say. Most of the fathers thought that the following are some of their shortcomings: including a lack of religious knowledge, insufficient time with their children, and a lack of patience. Most fathers felt their children would say they didn't spend enough time with them. A couple stated that their children would say they do not listen to them enough. One father actually stated that his children would say he is not compassionate enough.

These African American Muslim fathers indicated that a lack of religious knowledge was a serious shortcoming. So much so, they saw this as one of the key factors in the failure of their first marriage. As for not having enough time with their children, these fathers differed based on their presence or absence at home. Those fathers living at home prior to divorce, indicated a lack of time with their children was due to their work and their religious activities. As for the non-resident father, work and distance impacted the amount of time they were able to spend

with their children. For example, one father only visits with his children during the summer months. This is because the mother lives outside of the United States. Those Muslim fathers whose children live in within the same city have their children every weekend or every other weekend. This is not the only time that they spend with their children. When there are religious events, sports games, and other social activities, many fathers take their children with them. Finally, a lack of patience for these fathers was associated with their transition from being single men to family men.

## DIVORCE

Research studies on divorced parents are clear about the negative impact divorce has on the relationship between the father and his children. Furstenberg (1990) has indicated that, "The most obvious effects of divorce is that it typically brings about a sudden reconfiguration of the family. This reconfiguration leads to a single parent household, to a father's absence, and a reduction in the amount of time a father spends with his children"(p.384 ). Many studies on divorce are primarily focused on European American families. Researchers have done little to no research on the affect of divorce on African American fatherhood. African American Muslims are missing completely from the discussion.



How the Muslim men in this study dealt with their absence at home after divorce is significant to this study. It is equally important to understand how they adjusted to the new challenge to their role as fathers. How do these fathers feel when they are not able to see their children daily? How often do they see their children? What concerns do they have about their absence from the home? These are some of the questions I want to try to answer in this section.

When I asked Shafi`a how divorce had impacted his relationship with his children, he responded: “One of the things about the divorce is that I’m not in my house ...will just do basically whatever she wants to do. The things that I would not necessarily allow, she allows.” When asked for an example, he stated the following:

I’m not in the house to regulate attitudes and direct my children’s behavior. Like for instance, I feel my children need to build thickness... I work in corporate American I’m seeing like what’s happening. I see how some people just get used in the workplace- what these guys are exposing their children to. And so as a result of that, I’m looking at my children because their mother is not in the environment that I’m in because their step –father is not in the environment that I’m in. There’s a certain way that I feel my children - a certain attitude they have to start developing now – the type of confidence within themselves to make. Not being arrogant, but being very self-assured of who they are that demands respect from other people around them. I don’t feel as though I have the ability to completely ingrain that in them once I was out of the household.

Mustapha replied to the same question.

At different times it’s – for the majority of the times it’s been good. Sometimes we’ve had our rocky moments, but I would say that was because of certain personal

issues she's going through. But for the majority of the time I would say it's been good. It's been like six years now.

When Dawood was asked, he stated that, Actually being divorced has really in my view and in my daughter's view brought us closer together. Our time together now is just that, it's our time and it's not invaded by you know... So divorce has made it easier for me to be a father unfortunately.

Although these fathers have had some problems with their children's mothers since the divorce, this did not prevent them from spending time with their children. Neither the fathers nor their children were prevented from communicating with each other by phone or other means. While these fathers were able to maintain a relationship with their children, they were very much concerned with their children's socialization. Several fathers stressed that the family of their ex-wives were bad influences on their children. For example a couple fathers stated that they did not like the type of language their ex-wives' family used in front of their children. Other concerns of these fathers were with the mothers whom they felt allowed the children to get way with things that they would not allow, for instance, the way the children dressed. And, as Shafi`a pointed out above several fathers did not think that their ex-wives were capable of preparing their children to deal with the many challenges they will face as African Americans growing up in America.

The divorced fathers in the study all managed to reduce the impact of the divorce by being proactive in their children lives. All of them have relationships with their ex-

wives that allow them to be included in important matters concerning their children's education, health, their religious upbringing, and disciplining.

## CONCLUSION

Because of the lack of research on African American Muslim fathers and researchers focus on the absent father, many groups of fathers from this community have been ignored. This study of African American Muslim fathers not only introduces into the literature regarding fatherhood a group that has been completely neglected, but also an alternative paradigm for studying fatherhood in this community.

By exploring the influence of religion on Muslim fathers, this study is able to show that religion is an important motivational factor in the father and child relationship. Although there are few studies to investigate the influence of religion on fathering, those few that exist have shown that there is a correlation between a father's religious participation and his involvement in his children lives (Cooksey and Craig, 1998). These studies have not only focused on fathers who live at home with their children they have as Cooksey and Craig shown looked at the relationship of nonresidential father with their children.

The African American Muslim fathers in this study were all clear regarding the influence of religion in their choice to marry and their interaction with their children. An important implication from this study of Muslim fathers is future studies that explore the diversity of fatherhood in the African American community. Investigation into the role of religion in motivating African American fathers to have relationships with their children can provide valuable knowledge about fathering in that community.

This study's small sample size does not allow one to make any generalizations about African American or African American Muslim fathers. However, it does provide a valuable foundation for future research. This exploratory study of African American Muslim fathers can influence studies on fathering among African American men. The intersection of fatherhood and masculinity, religion, and race can provide valuable knowledge about how African American fatherhood is understood in the scholarly and African American communities. As I have shown in this study, religion is an indispensable paradigm for learning more about the diversity of African American fathering. In addition this study also provide a means to help us understand how African American fathers are able to maintain positive relationships with their children when they are faced with so many social challenges.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Demographic Sheet:

Interview no. \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your marital status?
  - Married
  - Single
  - Divorced
  - Engaged to be married
3. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
4. At what age were you when your first child was born? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How long have you been married? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Are you a convert to the religion of Islam? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How long have you identified yourself as a Muslim? - \_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you been married more than once? if yes, how many times have you been married before? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is the highest level of education you have completed
  - GED
  - High school

- Some college
- Completed two year degree
- Four years or more

10. What is your employment status

- Not employed presently
- Part time
- Full time
- If self employed please explain\_\_\_\_\_

11. Were both of your parents present in the home while you were growing up?\_\_\_\_\_

12. Is your wife Muslim also?\_\_\_\_\_

13. Are you a single father?\_\_\_\_\_

14. Was your mother a single mother?\_\_\_\_\_

15. Do you have and brothers and sister?, If so, how many?\_\_\_\_\_

16. Did you and your wife have children before getting married?\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX 2  
**Interview Guide**

Introduction to the recoded interview:

Before each interview, the interviewer states the following:

“This interview going to be recorded for research purposes. Please let me know if you do not wish to be recorded. If you agree you can request that the recording stop at any time throughout the interview.”

**1. Let’s start with you telling me about yourself (parents’ occupation, education and where you grew up).**

- What type of work did your father do?
- Did your mother work? If so, what type of work did she do?
- What are some of the good memories you have of your grandfather?
- Tell me a little about your brothers and uncles?
- Where did you grow up?
- Where did you go to school?
- How would you describe the community were you grew up?

**2. Lets discuss some of your ideas about marriage before you were married?**

- Tell did you always want to get married?

- What were some of your ideas about the way a marriage should work before you married?
- What influenced your perception of marriage the most?
- What was your life like before marriage?
- What was your notion of the role of fatherhood before you were married?
- What was your idea of a good wife before you were married?
- How did you and your wife meet?

3. **Let discuss your experience as a husband and father?**

- What were the age of you and your wife when you were married?
- Tell me a little about the wedding?
- After getting married, was it everything you expected it to be?
- How did marriage change your life?
- When your wife told you she was pregnant can you share some of the thoughts that went through your mind?
- How did your perception of fatherhood change with the birth of you first child?

4. **How has your religion influenced your notion of your role as a father?**

- Tell me how Islam has made you a better?

- Can you provide a few examples from the Quran or the life of the Prophet Muhammad that influence how you treat your children?

**5. Activities with your children**

- What type of out of the home activities do you do with your children?
- Do you help them with their homework?
- Tell me what is a typical day like with your children?

**6. Can you talk about some of the dreams you have for your children.**

- What type of education do you envision for your children?

**7. How has being divorce impact your relationship with your children?**

- How often do you see you children?
- Can you describe your relationship with the children's mother since the divorce?
- Did you ex-wife remarry?
- How does being away from your children everyday affect you?





