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We will show…

• The process by which low income men in high poverty neighborhoods become fathers
• Their beliefs about fatherhood
• Why father involvement is so high early on, yet falls off so dramatically as children age
• Fathering over the life course
Sample

• 165 low-income “non-custodial” fathers living in high poverty neighborhoods in 9 Camden/Philadelphia “neighborhoods”
• 2 1/2 years of ethnographic observation in East Camden
• Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study/Qualitative Addition to Fragile Families
Figure 1 - Hispanic female-headed household poverty rate by census tract, Philadelphia, 2000

% below poverty

- 0 - 10
- 11 - 21
- 21 - 30
- 31 - 40
- 40 - 100
- No Data

West Kensington
East Camden
North Camden
South Camden
Figure 2 - White Non-Hispanic female-headed household poverty rate by census tract, Philadelphia, 2000
Figure 1 - Black female-headed household poverty rate by census tract, Philadelphia, 2000

Strawberry Mansion
North Central
East Camden
North Camden
South Camden
Main Argument

• Strong drive to father despite precarious circumstances
• Key source of meaning and identity/potential turning point
• Precarious circumstances lead to breakup
• Mismatched norms, subsequent transitions, couple conflict, other barriers lead to sharp declines in involvement over time
• Fathers nonetheless satisfy their fathering desires through serial fathering
“Think back to when you first learned she was pregnant. What was your first reaction to the news?”

70% of Fathers’ Responses  Happiness/Clear Acceptance (Philadelphia/Camden)
75% of Fathers’ Responses  Happiness (FFQA, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York)
58% of Mothers’ Responses  Happiness (FFQA, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York)
African American

Darryl “I lit up!”
Stan “I wanted a kid real bad.”
Paul “I said, ‘You know that I am getting ready to go away [to prison] and really it is your choice, but I want you to have the baby because I don’t have any kids and I would like a child.’”
Steve “Deep inside I wanted to have a child.”
Bernie “I had wanted a child for years.”
Bucket “Shoot, I was happy, man!”
Amin “Even though I was not in love, I wanted a son.”
Wilbert “I was so happy, even though in the back of my mind I wondered, ‘Is it mines?’”
Lacey “I was going to have a baby! I was happy!”
O “I was happy! All the other girls killed my babies. I said, ‘She’s my first, I’m gonna give her everything.’”
Seven “My first son, I really looked forward to having him.”
David “I was happy! She was having a boy.”
Steven “I was glad! It was no major obstacle.”
White

Joe    “I wanted a son and I had a son.”
James  “I [planned] it. I said I want to have a kid. I wanted to get my girlfriend pregnant and have a baby. Nobody made me that way, that is me, how I came up…. I didn’t really think about the financial. I just wanted a kid.”
Roger  “I always wanted one.”
Little E. “I just wanted to be a dad.”
James  “When I found out she was pregnant everything changed I was like ‘I don’t care if she is cheating’ and at first I was so happy.”
Monte  “I was ready to have a kid.”
George “I said, “I love you,’ you know, ‘I’d love to have a child with you.”
Kevin  “I loved it, I love kids.”
Giani  “I thought, aw, sweetie, I'm going to be a daddy. That was my feeling…. if I could [have] bottled it and keep it, I would have.”
### Puerto Rican

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rafael</td>
<td>“I was scared and happy at the same time…. At the time I wanted to have a baby.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubin</td>
<td>“I was excited because I was going to have a child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvartino</td>
<td>“I felt good (when I found out my first girlfriend was pregnant) because that was the first time that I was going to have a baby. (A father at 19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>“I was so excited”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose</td>
<td>“I felt content, happy, you know? I never had kids, you know? In finding yourself a woman, you know--to be a father, you know--I felt happy. I had my daughter [coming] and I felt, you know, a little more, a little more of a man, you know? She was the first woman who made me a man, you know? I felt very content, very happy.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Fertility Intentions by Race and Ethnic Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Puerto Rican</th>
<th>All</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtless</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Planned</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 424 \text{ pregnancies} \]
Was the pregnancy planned, accidental, or somewhere in between? (Dad’s report)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camden/Philly Fathers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi Planned</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unthinking</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoided</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fathers in Qualitative Addition FF</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Between</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Contraception</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned, Not Contracepting</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraceptive Failure</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Bottom line: About 7 in 10 neither planned nor avoided
Precarious Circumstances

- UNSTABLE RELATIONSHIPS. Romantic relationships typically just a few months old
- LOW HUMAN CAPITAL. Economic situations precarious at best, prospects dim
- TROUBLED. Often already involved in some way in a set of activities they themselves, and the community at large, deems unacceptable for fathers, namely crime and substance use
Why the eagerness to embrace fatherhood?
Camden, NJ 1995
January
March
May
August
October
December
AA Fathers

• Kevin, 21  “I’d probably be in jail.”
• Q, 24    “[I’d be] Dead, because of the simple fact that it wasn’t until Brianna was born that I actually started to chill out….”
• Mike, 27  “I’d probably be dead somewhere, or back in hail, in and out of rehabs. … It’s given me something to fight for, something like a destination. I got to BE somewhere.”
• Apple, 27  “I guess after I got caught up in the bad life, as far as jail, the kids helped me keep my head up, look forward. I got something to live for. Kids give you something to live for.”
• John A., 34 ”I don’t think I would be as happy as I am now. Cause my kids make me feel totally different…. I feel more like a man.”
• Lee, 42   “Without the kids I’d probably be a dog. I hope not with Aids.”
• Seven, 37. “I couldn’t imagine being without them because when I am spending time with my kids it is like, now that is love. That is unconditional love…. It is like a drug that you got to have.”
White Fathers

- Michael, 21 “Basically like drugs, and robbing cars. I didn’t want my son to look at me and think that’s okay.”
- Alex, 22 “I would be out getting high because I would not have [anything]. I would have my girlfriend but my baby is the most important thing in my life right now.”
- Wil, 24 “I think I’d probably be in jail. My little brother is in jail and I figure without kids, whatever he was doing I’m sure I would have been doing it with him.”
- Tony, 26 I’m saying dead because I think she’s the only thing that make me stop [using.]”
- Walt, 37 “I would be dead. I would have killed myself a long time ago…. I already tried suicide twice….”
- Joe, 45 “Man I wouldn’t even know how to answer that, they ae such a big part of my life….I would probably be a bum down on 8th and Race or in jail at 8th and Race.”
- Bill, 38 “I’d still be out there…. I’d still be fucking off, drugs and Ill. I think about my kids and there’s just this HOPE [I have now] of getting a good relationship with them.”
Latino Fathers

- Rafael, 18  “If he wasn’t born I would probably be out in the streets.”
- Daniel, 23  “I think the world would be finished for me…nothing would matter at all, life wouldn’t matter to me because my child is to me all!”
- Oscar, 24  “I would be in the street, you understand? They keep me in order, because the baby is the light of my eyes.”
- Misel, 28  “It would be like the life I had before, a crazy one…. I wouldn’t have to worry about anyone but myself and I wouldn’t care what happened to me.”
- Gerardo, 40  “I think that I would have OD’ed using drugs and I would not be here.
- Raymond, 44  “I think that I would still probably be on drugs or doing something [criminal].” It was really my daughter [who] really changed me a lot. That is why she is so special because she waked me up…. Every time I see her, I be happy.”
- Carlos, 47  “I probably would have been dead. I probably would have been dead a long time ago. Yeah, because …I have friends that have died from overdoses of drugs, aids, alcoholic seizures and all kinds of stuff and most of those guys were those who didn’t have children. I would have ended up like one of them.”
Elvis, PR, 35

- What did you think your future was going to be before you had him?
- I wasn’t going to live past the age of 30.
- And then once you had him?
- I can’t even picture my life without Elvis in it…. I had already made a promise to myself. I had told my friends, “I don’t want to live past the age of 30. If I make it to 30, I’m going to take myself out…. He came into the picture when I was like 27, and that all changed. Everything changed. My whole life changed.
Lacey, black, 42

- *What would your life be like if you hadn’t had your children?*
- I can’t image that one. I really can’t…. Because my life without them, it would be empty. It would be empty. Because that’s what kept me going, knowing that I had to come out [of jail] and be there for them. 
- *How did you see your future before you became a father?*
- I didn’t have no future…. I didn’t care. I lived for the moment.
- *Did you think you would live to see 42?*
- No. Nobody did…. Nobody expected me to be there to see 17….
What does fatherhood mean?
Love
Moral Guide
Available
Communicator
Spends Quality Time
Role Model
Provider
Provide

Being able to provide for your kids. When you take a walk with them or walk around the neighborhood. They say, ‘Hey daddy, I want a water ice or a popsicle.’ You can’t say ‘I can’t do that right now.’ To be able to provide for your kids.

CPBA11

I want my boy to look at me like a father role where he can come up to me and ask me, "daddy I want to go to burger king, daddy I need some sneakers, daddy I need this and that" and I can say "come on let’s go".

LA06

As far as taking care of the child financially. Don’t leave everything up to the mother.

BY08

[I give about $25 a week.] It fills my responsibility. I should give something.

WA32
Doing the Best I Can

[The mother] may call up and say “The baby needs this” or whatever. And if I only got like 100 dollars come Sunday or Saturday I got to get me through the week. You follow what I’m saying?

WA38

If you can’t take care of yourself you’re not going to take care of anyone else. So as soon I’m able to give financial support, then I’ll be able get back to doing my normal thing.

WA28

I just told them, “I love you’s, I always love you’s. Right now I know I’m no good to you because I’m not supporting you financially, but I did give your mother the house for you’s to live in, and I help you when I can. Some day I’ll get myself reestablished, and I’ll be able to help you again. But until then, I can’t even help myself,”

WA35

They birthday come, you can’t get them nothing, you feel like shit. You know, the ones I have, I try to give them what I didn’t have. I didn’t want their lives to be like mine. But they get what they need. Not what they want, what they need. She takes good care of them. I can say that. But, like right now, I wouldn’t be able to take real good care of them. I’d be a father, but that’s going to take me a little bit of work.

WA26
Andre Green 17 Months Later
Mother Report of Father-Child Contact at 12 Months among Children Born to Unmarried Parents

![Bar Chart]

- Daily contact:
  - Overall: 40%
  - Black: 30%
  - White: 45%
  - Hispanic: 50%

- At least weekly contact:
  - Overall: 60%
  - Black: 50%
  - White: 65%
  - Hispanic: 70%

- At least monthly contact:
  - Overall: 80%
  - Black: 70%
  - White: 85%
  - Hispanic: 90%

- Since last wave:
  - Overall: 100%
  - Black: 90%
  - White: 100%
  - Hispanic: 100%
Mother Report of Father-Child Contact at 60 Months among Children Born to Unmarried Parents
Fragile Families Data
(Research Brief 39, June 2007)
Mother Report of At Least Monthly Father-Child Contact for Children Born to Unmarried Parents by Number of Survey Waves since Father Romantically Involved with Mother
Reasons for Breakup

- **Unstable relationships**
  - Argue 34%
  - He cheat 25%
  - She cheat 18%
  - Not in love 13%
  - DV 13%
  - Her kin 12%
  - She bossy/greedy 8%
  - She move away 5%

- **Human Capital**
  - Money 14%

- **Troubled**
  - He substance use 34%
  - Incarceration 18%
  - Her substance use 14%
  - He crime gang 9%
  - She party 8%
Barriers to Father Involvement

• Unstable Relationships
  – Relp difficulties 17%
  – Gatekeeping 13%
  – Mother relocation 6%
  – Her kin 2%
  – Paternity doubts 1%

• Human Capital
  – Earnings 4%

• Troubled
  – Substance abuse 25%
  – Prison 14%

• Other
  – Distance 12%
  – Lacks desire 6%
Of those who are not, 1/2 are married to another mother and 2/3 of these are living with a marital child. 2/3 are intensively involved with at least one of their nonmarital children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1984</th>
<th></th>
<th>1988</th>
<th></th>
<th>1992</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Visit</td>
<td>113,466</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>164,607</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>308,967</td>
<td>13.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visited Less Than Once per Month</td>
<td>142,941</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>204,635</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>288,712</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited 1-3 Times per Month</td>
<td>91,403</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>149,855</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>156,282</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visited at Least Once per Week</td>
<td>297,951</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>377,511</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>457,972</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with Child but Not Mother</td>
<td>30,881</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>70,245</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>120,552</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Married, Lived with Child, Mother</td>
<td>116,906</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>261,408</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>320,570</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, Lived with Child, Mother</td>
<td>266,717</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>516,269</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>685,411</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,060,265</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,744,530</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2,338,466</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the Baby

(Fragile Families baseline results for romantically involved couples)

- Dad ever incarcerated 39%
- Dad earned < $10,000 last year 33%
- Dad isn’t employed now 24%
- Mom (Dad) a high school dropout 40%
- Either has child with previous partner 61%