



# **Discrepancies in Mothers' and Fathers' Expectations, Priorities, and Reports of Co- Parenting Quality**

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## Promoting Paternal Participation Project

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- Partnership with Louisville Metro Healthy Start
  - Needs assessment project aimed at identifying gaps in services
  - 115 (70 moms, 31 dads, 14 staff) participants from maternal and child health program
  - 80.2% unmarried, 85.1% African American
  - Mixed methods (survey, focus groups, & individual interviews)
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## Methods

### Sample

*Table 1. Participant Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Mothers		Fathers		Total	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	28.85	6.32	32.80	8.43	30.05	7.22
Children	2.90	1.91	3.33	2.00	3.03	1.94
Childbearing partners	1.91	.94	2.03	1.21	1.95	1.02
Co-resident children	2.42	1.69	1.77	1.64	2.22	1.69

## Methods

### Measures

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#### *Co-parenting Relationship Quality*

Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), 7 items measured on a 5 point scale. The internal consistency score for the current sample was  $\alpha = .92$ .

#### *Attitudes towards Fathers' Involvement*

3 items inquiring into participants' attitudes related to fathers' involvement. The internal consistency score for the current sample was  $\alpha = .73$ .

#### *Prioritized Fathering Roles*

Morman and Floyd (2006) approach yielding 19 distinct fathering roles. Healthy Start parents rank ordered their top 5 priorities (e.g., the most important role = 5 points, fifth most important role = 1 point).

## Quantitative

- Descriptive stats, frequencies, t-tests, aggregated totals from prioritized fathering roles

## Qualitative

- Phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998)

## Results

### Quantitative

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- The first *t*-test compared mothers' reports of co-parenting quality to fathers' reports. Mothers' reports were significantly lower ( $M = 26.20$ ,  $SD = 8.58$ ) than fathers' reports ( $M = 31.17$ ,  $SD = 4.48$ ),  $t(96) = -2.948$ ,  $p = .00$ .
- The second *t*-test compared mothers' attitudes towards fathers' involvement to those of fathers. Mother reported attitudes were significantly less favorable than ( $M = 12.39$ ,  $SD = 2.68$ ) fathers' reports ( $M = 13.74$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ),  $t(97) = -2.639$ ,  $p = .01$ .

# Results

## Quantitative

*Table 2. Healthy Start Parents' Paternal Priorities*

Moms			Dads		
Role	n (%)	Total	Role	n (%)	Total
Love	55(78.6)	227	Love	24(77.4)	89
Relationship with mom	41(58.6)	138	Provider	19(61.3)	60
Provider	41(58.6)	132	Disciplinarian	15(48.4)	51
Involvement	37(52.9)	129	Protector	13(41.9)	43
Affection	32(45.7)	101	Support (emotional)	14(45.2)	42

## Results

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- Analyses revealed that there was agreement between mothers and fathers regarding the importance of love and being a financial provider, however, the other top rated roles diverged
- Fathers prioritized abstract roles including being a disciplinarian, protector, and emotional supporter
- Mothers prioritized fathers having a cooperative relationship with their child's mother, being involved with the child, and being affectionate with the child

## Qualitative

### Fathers' Interviews

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- Fathers' parenting goals
- Fathers' beliefs that mothers were and *should* take the primary responsibility for caregiving
- The ways mothers facilitated their involvement

## Fathers' Interviews

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“So she keeps me together and she appreciates everything I do. She tells me all the time and that feels good for a man to hear his wife say, ... I appreciate you. I thank you for going to work. I thank you for helping the best way you can with the kids. I thank you. Same thing as me. I appreciate everything she does while I am at work with the kids and stuff. It is a mutual thing. It’s half and half, fifty/fifty... It kind of justifies I am doing a good job. It makes me want to do a little bit more. You know, Baby, go ahead and sleep in. I will get the kids ready for school.”– *Married, Resident Father*

## Fathers' Interviews

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“She’s just more like the person that is the facilitator, so she pretty much know[s] first-hand what’s going on. You know, I met their teachers and everything, but she’s able to, her schedule is a bit more flexible where she can actually meet with them, she kinda spear-heads that and kinda, you know, takes the lead on that, but she fills me in and I do whatever it is that I need to do to support any decisions that we need to make. She’s more so, in the loop with them and then we talk about it and whatever part I need to play to try to get to a particular outcome, then I’ll play whatever part that I need to play.”—*Cohabiting Unwed Father*

## Fathers' Interviews

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“Man, like I said, man, you gotta turn the cold shoulder sometimes, man. You know, it’s a whole lot of females that get jealous of you when they [their] don’t get they way. So if you find another female and decide to go with her for whatever reason they get mad, so they gonna do whatever they can, you know to try to get you and hurt you. And try to make shit hard for you... You know they gone do whatever they need to do, so it’s best that we learn this system and learn how the child support system work cause we got rights too, you know. And that’s why I said you know, I’ll be going down pretty soon and get my visitation rights cause I ain’t gonna keep going through this.”– *Unwed, Non Custodial Father*

## Results

### Mothers' Interviews

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- Mothers' report of their preferred parenting roles for their children's fathers
- Mothers' discussion of fathers' strengths and weaknesses
- Mothers report of their efforts to encourage fathers' involvement and the frustration that mothers experienced when fathers failed to respond

## Mothers' Interviews

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“Well, I make sure to keep in contact with him, like we text back and forth. He works two jobs so he is at one job in the morning, evening at another, so we try to communicate back and forth throughout the day and, you know. If my son asks for him I will let him know or we will send a video or maybe we try to face-time, you know. Something to let him know basically, you know, don't forget about your child and you know we worrying about you and I'm worried about you and we want to let you know we are here for you. So like even though we're not together, the type of friendship thing to let him know.”—*Unmarried Custodial Mother*

## Mothers' Interviews

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“He [child’s father] was like I just gave this [undetermined sum of money], where’d that go to? But I’m driving back and forth and they [children] got practice over here and the other one has practice over there, its gas money, you know what I’m saying? Then if a project comes up for school, I have to go buy the supplies for the project, you know? So I’m like what you mean you gave me? You ain’t gave *me* nothing.”

–*Unmarried, Custodial Mother*

## Mothers' Interviews

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“Right now its like pulling teeth to get him to do anything. It’s a catch 22 when we communicate. I feel like I am constantly having to call, and to be the one to reach out – to the point where I get frustrated and I react. Then when I react, its like OK well, you have an attitude that’s why I don’t want to talk to you that’s why I don’t want to deal with you. So either way I’m stuck – either I’m doing too much or I’m not doing enough. So, how do you communicate effectively to where you can do what needs to be done for the child?”—*Unmarried Mother*

## Discussion

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### Quantitative

- Moms reported less positive attitudes towards fathers' involvement and co-parenting relationship quality
- Moms and dads agreed on some role for fathers and diverged on others

### Qualitative

- Moms and dads agreed that mothers were primary caregivers
- Dads reported that moms *should* be primary caregivers
- Moms and dads reported that fathers' involvement is often facilitated by mothers
- There was variability in the effectiveness of mothers' efforts to facilitate
- Frustration, resentment, and gatekeeping grew out of unsuccessful efforts to facilitate

## Discussion

### Practice Implications, Future Research & Next Steps

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- Policy & practice changes aimed at increasing father friendliness and accountability for engaging fathers
- Healthy Babies Louisville
- Fatherhood & co-parenting education intervention and evaluation study (curricula that feature expectations' discussions and parenting plans of action)

## Discussion

### Limitations

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- Study was exploratory and its results are preliminary
- Cross sectional and only included one data collection wave
- Small, convenience sample
- Mothers and fathers' reports were not matched. As such, the most severely disengaged fathers could not be contacted



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# Conclusion

- Are there any questions or comments?

## Contact Information

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