Article

It's All about the Children: An Intersectional Perspective on Parenting Values among Black Married Couples in the United States

Caitlin Cross-Barnet [1,*] and Katrina Bell McDonald [2]

[1] Hopkins Population Center, The Johns Hopkins University, 3003 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 22128, USA

[2] Department of Sociology, The Johns Hopkins University, 3400 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218, USA; E-Mail: mcdon@jhu.edu

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: ccb@jhu.edu; Tel.: +1-410-218-2107.

Abstract: Black families in the United States are usually studied from a deficit perspective that primarily considers single parents in poverty. There is, however, considerable diversity among American Black families in terms of social class, immigration status, marital status, and parenting values and practices. Using data from the Contemporary Black Marriage Study, a study of young married couples who are native-born Black, African immigrants, or Caribbean immigrants, this research examines childbearing and parenting values from an intersectional perspective. A sample of whites is included for comparison purposes. The research considers impacts of social class, immigration, gender, and race as well as structural influences. Diversity exists both within and among social and demographic groups.

Keywords: immigration; United States; families; Black/African American; social class; intersectionality

1. Introduction, Theoretical Orientation, and Literature Review

Scholarship on Black childrearing and parenting has generally followed a deficit model. Research frequently confounds being Black with being poor and focuses on low-income single mothers or non-residential fathers and examines outcomes for children [1]. While there is some literature that addresses Black mothering e.g., [2], literature on Black fathering, especially among the non-poor, is still scant [1], as is investigative scholarship on parenting among Black married couples. Though marriage rates among Black parents have declined since the 1960s, more than a third of Black children lived with two married parents in 2014 [3]. Poverty rates among Blacks have declined substantially during the same period, from over 40% in 1966 to 27% in 2012 [4], and the strongest income gains for Black households have accrued among those headed by a married couple [5]. Black immigration has also increased rapidly in recent decades; in 2015, nearly 9% of the American Black population was foreign born, nearly triple the percentage in 1980 [6].

Despite increasing diversity among Black families, Black research participants are often grouped unilaterally in studies, sometimes with an assumption that the group's parenting values and practices are universal. Research that has considered within-group differences has usually addressed social class, e.g., [7]. Family research on Hispanic subgroups, however, indicates the importance of considering other within-group differences, such as immigrant generation and country of origin, e.g., [8]. Some have long argued that similar nuances should be applied to analysis of Black families [9]. This paper considers Black families from an intersectional approach, using qualitative research and analysis to investigate childbearing and parenting values among American native-born Blacks and Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. Study participants are from across the class spectrum, both in regard to income and education levels. All participants have been married at least 5 years, and almost all have young children living at home. The study also includes a small group of white families for comparison purposes. We ask, how are differences in childbearing and parenting values influenced by class, race, immigration status, and gender? How do childbearing and -rearing impact marriage? How are views and practices influenced by social and institutional structures in families' lives?

Academic parenting literature often suggests a universal, normative ideal. Frequently cited are typologies developed by Diane Baumrind in the 1960s [10]. "Authoritative" parenting, rather than "authoritarian" or "permissive" parenting, is generally touted as best. Permissive parents do not rely on punitive discipline; they try to be affirming and reason with children rather than exercising overt control. Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, value absolute standards of behavior, expect obedience, and practice punitive punishment. Authoritative parents recognize their children as individuals and communicate through reason, though they will set standards and exert rational control. Studies indicate that parenting practices such as reasoning and communication do seem to enhance children's outcomes, e.g., [11].

In his seminal work *Class and Conformity* [12], social psychologist Melvin Kohn found that the father's job influenced parenting values: Working-class parents emphasized obedience in their children, a more authoritarian style, while middle-class parents emphasized self-direction, a more permissive or authoritative style. Lareau [7] found similar differences between families in which parents were college educated, which she categorized as middle class, and those in which parents had not attended college, which she categorized as working class. She also found that middle-class parents

practiced "concerted cultivation", providing children with structured learning opportunities and social play. Working-class parents practiced "natural growth", in which children conducted their lives separately from adults, often socializing in relatively unsupervised milieus with mixed-age groups of siblings and cousins.

Lareau specifically researched Black families and white families and concluded that social class was the most important factor in parenting values. Some have criticized class-based approaches as not adequately addressing race differences or structural conditions. For instance, in testing hypotheses based on Lareau's work, Cheadle and Amato [13] found significant race differences regarding practices of concerted cultivation, even after controlling for social class. Bennett, Lutz, and Jayaram [14] posit that differences in structured activity participation between middle-class and lower-income children is based on factors such as safety concerns regarding neighborhood locations or differences in activity options offered by schools serving different student populations, not by parental preferences. Although Lareau and her critics examine intersections of race and class, they do not consider Black immigration, and the researchers do not discuss families in which social class or ethnic backgrounds are different between mothers and fathers. Intermarriage is increasingly common [15], and in about half of married couples, both black and white, spouses have different levels of education [5].

Surveys show that all kinds of identities influence parenting values, and that differences can be observed across and within identities. For example, whether it is beneficial or harmful for mothers of young children to be employed has been a controversy studied for decades. Even though opinions about mothers' employment have changed considerably—in 2012, only 35% of people agreed that a preschooler "suffers" when the mother works, *versus* 67% in 1977 [16]—according to a recent Pew study, 60% of Americans still believe that it is "best for children" to have a parent at home. Still, there is wide variation in who believes what. White evangelicals are most likely to believe that preschoolers suffer when their mother works, and Black Protestants are least likely to take this view. Even though families with a parent at home are far more likely to live in poverty, the Pew study found that people without a high school diploma, who are also more likely to be poor, are substantially more likely than those with more education to believe that children are best off when one parent stays home. They also found that men are more likely than women to say it is best for children to have a parent at home, though an at-home parent is almost always a woman [17]. Despite a long tradition of black mothers in the workforce, e.g., [2], unlike opinions on whether preschoolers with working mothers "suffer", there was no difference between blacks and whites in agreement about the benefit of an at-home parent [17]. These data remain primarily descriptive and do not delve into multiple intersectional identities or immigration status, and they do not explore the gap that may occur between parental attitudes and empirical practice.

Some research explores differences in family values and structure by race but does not necessarily consider social class intersections. For instance, vital statistics data show births in adolescence are more likely for Black women than for white women, while white women are more likely than Black women to have a first birth at age 35 or older. Around 40% of births in the United States occur outside of marriage, but the rate for Black mothers is about double what it is for white mothers [18]. At the same time, Black mothers are thought to be more likely to have extended kin networks, especially their own mothers, to assist in childrearing, and many scholars posit that married Black couples are more flexible and egalitarian in their family roles than are white couples, e.g., [19]; however, egalitarianism

is not always well defined and is sometimes limited to the idea that both parents contribute to the economic sustenance of the household. Although historically Black mothers were more likely to be employed than white mothers, in recent decades, about two-thirds of both Black and white mothers have been employed, e.g., [20]; however, it is not clear if this confluence has had a corresponding impact on values regarding childbearing and parenting among intersecting identities of race, class, gender and immigration status.

What literature exists on Caribbean and African immigrants and on parenting in Africa and the Caribbean gives credence to the importance of considering within-group differences among Blacks living in the United States. Caribbean and African immigrants are not only different from native-born Blacks on a number of measures, they are also different, both demographically and culturally, from each other. Africans are more likely to be married and their children more likely to live in a two-parent household than Caribbean immigrants [21]. Black Caribbean and African immigrant families have more children on average than native-born Black Americans [22]. Families in both Africa and the Caribbean usually have a more collective orientation than American families, and extended family relationships and interactions are more common, unlike the nuclear family focus espoused as ideal in the dominant American culture [23,24]. Caribbean and African fathers are more likely to be authoritarian in parenting style, and families are more likely to practice harsh corporal punishment, than families in the United States [25,26].

Although there is some variation within and among countries, family practices in the Caribbean as a whole are relatively consistent [27]. There are high rates of family formation outside of marriage; for instance, 85% of children in Jamaica are born outside of marriage [28]. Many marriages begin as common-law unions and become formalized years after the couple has had children together [24]. Men dominate in Caribbean society, and fatherhood often brings conflict between masculinity, which entails aggression and competitiveness, and being responsible as a father; at the same time, many men feel that they would sacrifice a claim to masculinity if they did not become fathers [28]. Being a breadwinner and provider is central to many Caribbean fathers' identities. In one study of Caribbean fathers conducted in 2005, 44% of fathers rated themselves most positively for financially supporting their children, while only 20% said their most positive fathering contribution was being there for their children [28]. Mothers generally perform most daily tasks related to home and children with little assistance from men [24], who are most likely to step in as mentors to older boys or as disciplinarians [28].

Motherhood is exalted in many African countries, with women gaining little status as wives, but having more as mothers [29]; research on African fathers is thin [30]. Family and parenting practices vary more within and among African countries than they do in the Caribbean, especially between agrarian societies and more Westernized urban ones [30]. Kingsley Nyarko [26] notes that in Ghana, children are the main source of old-age support as well as a source of labor and social status, and intentionally childless marriages are virtually unheard of. In Kenya, despite advances in women's employment, men tend to maintain traditional definitions of masculinity, and women are primary homemakers and caregivers for children [30]. Fathers' involvement is with sons who are preschool aged and older, and families often lead lives that involve extended kin networks, but are gender segregated [31]. Still, many cultural groups within both Ghana and Kenya, as well as in other African nations, have adapted parenting practices in accordance with societal changes [26,30,31].

Despite the differences in childbearing and parenting values most common in Caribbean countries or African countries and those more typical in the United States, Black immigrants are rarely accounted for in family studies. As is the case with native-born Blacks, Black immigrants may occupy different positions across the class spectrum. In addition, there may be intermarriage between immigrant and native-born Blacks, and these intermarriages may show variations that include assimilation of values, conflict, or a hybridization of values. Interracial marriages or those across class categories have the same potential. Attitudes may differ regarding the timing of birth, the importance of marriage for children's well-being, the value of children to a family, the importance of time with children, parental employment, roles for mothers and fathers, differences in attitudes towards sons *versus* daughters, and childcare.

Societal structures are also important to consider alongside intersectional identities. As noted previously, some scholars feel that structural limitations, not parental values, drive class-based differences in parenting. In a study of work-family ideals, supportive work-family policies were found to increase support for shared parenting and employment among men and women of all educational backgrounds [32]; family-friendly work policies or policies that are punitive toward parents may impact the values or practices of individual families. The penal system disproportionately affects Black men in the United States, particularly those who are from lower-income neighborhoods [33], and concerns regarding incarceration or other interactions with the legal system may impact parental values. Mwoma [30] (p. 412) notes that in Africa, "men's roles change relative to economic, demographic, social and political conditions within the immediate environment," so it is expected that immigration could substantially impact parenting practices and values. Our study considers the intersection of structure and identity in addition to intersectional identities.

2. Methods

This paper analyzes data from the Contemporary Black Marriage Study (CBMS). The study was launched in 2007 in order to explore cross-racial/ethnic marital and family experience through a qualitative investigation of attitudes toward and the experience of contemporary married life among Black couples. The research seeks to disentangle the frequent confounding of race, ethnicity and class by conducting direct comparisons among couples of varying backgrounds, particularly representing the increasing heterogeneity of Black married couples in the United States. Our sample therefore considers native-born Blacks and Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, all from the lower to middle socioeconomic strata. All immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean were black with the exception of one, a white Cuban man married to a Black Cuban woman. Most Caribbean immigrants were from Jamaica or Trinidad, but some were from other islands such as the Bahamas, Guyana, or Haiti. African immigrants hailed from sub-Saharan African countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Senegal, Uganda, and Kenya, among others. Our sample includes a comparison group of white couples also situated in the lower to middle socioeconomic strata. The study seeks to expand research beyond the deficit model of Black family life to address married couples who are in their 30s and thus came of age after passage of civil rights laws and the women's movement.

The CBMS utilizes a survey, a series of intensive interviews, direct observations of couples and their interactions with their children, and an Internet diary. The authors of this paper interviewed a

total of 61 couples: 14 white, 20 native-born Black, 13 in which at least one spouse was born in the Caribbean, and 14 in which at least one spouse was born in Africa. All 61 couples were directly observed, completed the survey and participated in three interviews, one with the couple together, and separate follow-up interviews with each individual spouse. Based in large part on the finding that in the 1990s, more than a quarter of all Black marriages dissolve by year 5 and that about half dissolve within the first 15 years [34], the sample was restricted to respondents currently married for at least 5 years. All but three couples had minor children living at home. Most were the biological children of both spouses, but the timing of births ranged from well before the couple had married to several years after marriage. Some families included either resident or non-resident stepchildren. Most participants had completed high school; the highest level of education was at the master's level, though a small number were pursuing professional degrees. Among our least-educated participants, some had not finished ninth grade. Household incomes ranged from well below the poverty line to just over $150,000 a year.

Our native-born Black and white respondents were drawn from the Beginning School Study (BSS). Begun in 1982 by Johns Hopkins University faculty members Doris Entwisle and Karl Alexander, the BSS was constructed as a random sample of 800 children beginning first grade in an urban public school system. It intentionally drew both Black and white children from across the class spectrum. During the 2005 tracking effort, the BSS located over 600 of its original study panel. Drawing families from the BSS to develop the sample of CBMS couples allowed limiting respondents to those who are approximately the same age and who came from the same metropolitan region, thus offering some continuity among participants. Because the respondents had last been interviewed by the BSS in 2005, they were easier to locate than another sample might have been, and their long tenure with the BSS had built trust and acclimated participants to the research process. BSS data was not used other than to identify those who had been married at least 5 years; only this group was invited to participate in the CBMS. Notably, there were many more white participants than Black participants who met this criterion, which allowed us to select white participants in a similar income range to Black participants.

To locate African and Caribbean immigrant couples between ages 30 and 40 who had been married five years or more, we began with the BSS, where we successfully recruited one native-born Black man who married a Caribbean immigrant and one native-born Black woman who married an African immigrant. Snowball sampling attempts with participants were unsuccessful because potential referrals did not meet age parameters or had not been married long enough. We were able to recruit only two couples through repeated contact with more than 30 Baltimore-area organizations that assist African and Caribbean immigrants. We recruited four additional couples by tapping personal contacts for referrals and by passing out or posting flyers at Caribbean festivals, local universities, or businesses catering to Black immigrants. Beginning in 2009, we began bimonthly postings to the local Craigslist site, and received responses from eligible couples almost every time, creating the bulk of our sample.

Data were collected from the study group in four ways:

(1) Each couple completed a demographics questionnaire and a baseline marriage assessment (Enriching Relationship Issues, Communications and Happiness—ENRICH).

(2) Each couple was interviewed by one of the primary researchers for approximately 60–90 minutes immediately after completing the ENRICH inventory, usually in the couple's home.

(3) Spouses were each interviewed alone (either on that same day or at a later date), allowing for clarification and expansion of personal perspectives. These interviews generally lasted 30–60 minutes, during which time the other spouse left the interview site.

(4) Field notes were made regarding informal interactions observed between spouses and their children while the interviewers were present. When feasible, researchers also observed the couple in a family activity such as eating a meal or playing with their children.

(5) Online marriage diaries were constructed by a sub-sample of couples. Each of these husbands and wives was asked to submit diary entries for 3 to 6 months. Sixteen participating husbands and wives submitted almost 200 entries of varying lengths.

Most interviews were fully transcribed, and all were compiled into profiles that included transcriptions of the substantive quotes responding to the interview questions in the field guide, other relevant quotes, and information from the researchers' field notes. We analyzed the data using the principles of grounded theory and an open, axial, and selective coding sequence [35]. Open coding revealed narratives around parenting that were not easily categorizable by racial-ethic group. Some parenting patterns were relatively consistent, such as the primacy of mothers or the importance of breadwinning for fathers, but there was no single pattern that arose around most other parenting values or practices. During the axial phase, we categorized parenting values and practices that arose in the interviews and observations into many inductive subcodes such as childbearing values, roles of mothers and fathers, childcare, and discipline. After diverse themes arose around these, we used selective coding to identify the narrative story underlying parenting among racial-ethnic groups. Here we found that there were substantial differences both within and among the groups, with the African American, Caribbean, and African groups as substantially different from one another as they were from the whites. Gender, social class, immigration, and structural contexts influenced variations.

3. Results and Discussion

Couples differed substantially in their thoughts about the relation of marriage and childbirth and about the role children should play in a marriage. Lower-income couples, especially native-born Blacks and whites, usually had children before they married. As suggested by Edin and Kefalas [36], many of these couples seemed to be testing their compatibility and each other's level of responsibility before being willing to marry. Some fathers explained that they were particularly moved to marry after having a son. Ted Posner (all names used are pseudonyms), who is white and works stocking shelves, said he began to pressure his wife to marry him after they had their second child, a son: "well, I had my boy then". Gwen Byrd, who is native-born Black, was surprised to learn during the interview that having a son has influenced her husband, who already had two daughters with other women, toward marriage: "Is that part of the reason you married me? Because I gave you your first son?" to which her husband responded, "Uh huh".

Pregnancy was more likely to propel couples to marry if they were college educated. Amy Abbas, a white mother of one and a chemist, was obviously embarrassed when she discussed her decision to marry: "I guess it's best to be honest. We became pregnant". Sometimes marrying was seen as important not to save face, but to provide the right environment for the child. Dixon Ryan, who is Caribbean, said his wife's pregnancy "sealed the coffin" on their decision to marry because they

wanted their child to have "an actual family", not "just a mommy and daddy". Some couples already had wedding plans when a pregnancy came sooner than expected. Black middle-class couples sometime expressed pride in marrying before deciding to have children. Lamar Albright, who is Caribbean, explained that there is never an ideal time for kids, and after being married five years, he and his wife felt they deserved to have a child: "Why punish ourselves? We did everything right". Others discussed becoming a parent as an essential life stage. Charlene Cox, a native-born Black mother who runs a daycare center, said once she had married, having a child was the next thing she needed to do: "everything was coming together... I wanted to complete my circle". Middle-class whites often indicated that getting married, alone, was a reason to have a child. Allen Kennedy, a white father of three and a computer programmer, said of his decision to become a father, "Well, there was no reason not to [have kids]. Once you get married, it's 'might as well have some kids'".

Many couples, once married, felt their role as parents kept them together, and the children often became more important than the marriage itself, especially for Black immigrant families. As Taylor McCoy, a Caribbean stay-at-home mother of four, said as her husband, an artist, nodded, "It's all about the children". Abeni Sesay, who was having problems with secondary infertility, felt pressured to have more children for her husband because in Cameroon, they are a sign of the man's "greatness". Lamenting lost time as a couple was relatively unusual. A few parents referred to "a loss of independence" or a lack of time alone, but this was usually discussed as a matter of course. Only the Barlows, a native-born Black couple who each brought a daughter to the marriage, then had a son together, said in their ideal marriage, "Kids would not be around. We love our kids to death, we just don't like them. We wouldn't have kids right now". The couple says they are looking forward to being in their 40s when the kids are out of the house. He is a banker and she is a receptionist; they feel once their children are gone, they will have surplus income to enjoy themselves. No other couple we interviewed said anything about wanting to be child-free. Many said children were the best thing about being married.

In addition to prioritizing children, other aspects of parenting values were common among couples of all backgrounds. Both men and women usually stressed the provider role for men, whether the mother in the family worked or not. Especially among whites and Caribbeans, both men and women expressed that the provider role was the most important aspect of being a father. For instance, Meredith Kennedy, a mother of three whose husband works in software development, stressed that "the man is responsible for making enough money (while) the wife stays at home with the children". Ethan Springfield, a white father who is currently unemployed, told us, "As long as I can put food on the table and clothes on my daughter's back, that's what my main concern is". Ava Tompkins, a Caribbean mother of two who works full-time herself, said, "(The father) should be the head of the household. He should be the provider, but not the sole provider". In several other Caribbean families we interviewed, however, the husband and wife agreed that despite serious financial distress, the wife should not take an outside job because it would threaten the husband's position as the family's provider.

Black men of all origins, especially working-class and lower-income men, were more likely to express anxieties about not fulfilling a provider role. When Emmanuel Marshall, an independent businessman and father of one, reflected on a previous spate of unemployment, he said, "I wasn't doing what I thought I should be doing and providing. I think that it affected the way I was as a person. I was a pretty tough person to live with". Black men, and native-born Black men in particular,

discussed difficulties in the job market and the disadvantages they faced that made it difficult to function as providers, especially if they had served time in prison. Even though Black men outearn Black women [37], in our study, many expressed that women seemed to have the economic advantage. Adam Gardner, a native-born black father who had been convicted of a felony, told us, "They always say that the male should take care of the family, financially, but the female makes more than the male nine times out of ten". Similarly, Travon Sesay, from Cameroon, said, "Most of the time women make more money than the husband. It can be a problem for the marriage sometimes". Several Black fathers, both immigrant and native-born, discussed the importance of staying out of prison in order to be there for their children, but stints in prison also made employment that much harder to find. As if to reinforce the rarity of the married, Black male provider, Marlon Byrd, a native-born Black construction worker whose wife is not working, said, "You don't have too many black men who want to stand up and take care of their responsibilities…I like being different".

Working women sometimes referred to their salaries as "helping" their husbands, especially when they worked part-time, and especially if the family felt strongly about the man being the primary provider. In many lower-income and working-class families, couples seemed to feel that mothers' employment should be optional. Some husbands pressured their wives to quit their jobs, saying, "I like having her at home", but for many spouses, work was an essential element of a father's identity apart from financial concerns. When imagining a father's role in an ideal marriage, husbands and wives often indicated that the husband should be employed, even if in their imaginations, working would not be economically necessary. Bart McAllister, a native-born Black father of one who works seasonally and is often unemployed, fantasized about working all day and coming home to a hot meal, slippers, and his favorite television shows. Harold Wilcox, a white salesman and father of one, said that in an ideal marriage, "Husband goes out and works, wife stays home and takes care of the kids, and that's it. It's the American way. It's the American old-fashioned way". Some women wished their husbands could work less, but they would still work; for instance, Hannah Marshall, who is native born but married to Emmanuel, the Ethiopian father who was deeply affected by being unemployed, said in her ideal marriage, "He would work. I know it's important for him to be self-employed. I'd like him to be in something that is well-established and that he doesn't have to be in charge all the time". An exception to the centrality of male providership was revealed among native-born black women, especially those who were working class or poor, who were more likely to express that fulfilling a provider or breadwinner role was not essential to masculinity. As Sharon Russell, who is native-born Black and the primary earner for her financially struggling family, said, "I think [my husband] thinks having a job and making a financial contribution is him being a man. Sometimes you're more of a man if you stick in there and you don't give up".

Mothers were almost always considered children's primary parent whether they worked or not and whether the father worked or not. Reggie Morrison, a Caribbean father, is unemployed and thus cares for his children while his wife works, yet when she comes home, he expects that she will immediately take charge. Even among couples with relatively egalitarian divisions of labor, the mother functioned as the primary parent. For instance, Emmett and Denise Smith, both native-born Black, and both with social worker degrees, split home tasks, but he does more of the cleaning while she does "the bulk of the childcare". Pamela Taylor, a white mother of two, lives in a middle-class suburb. She vastly out-earns her husband, Richard, but both do household tasks. When asked if Richard could be the primary

parent, Pamela stammers, "I don't think he would—he could—take care of them on a full-time basis by himself. He would do everything he needed to do to make sure we had the money", even though her salary could support their whole family and his could not. Later she acknowledges, "I guess he could do it if he had to, like if I were to die or something". She cannot imagine Richard as the primary parent unless she is erased from the picture entirely. The only family we interviewed where the father truly functioned as a primary parent was the McAllisters, an African American family with serious financial struggles; Bart, the father, was unemployed. Bart had a biological son from a previous relationship and made most parenting decisions regarding the child; he also cared for his niece while his wife's sister attended high school. His wife Lori had no biological children. As if to affirm that primary parenting is not a father's role, Bart referred to himself as "Mr. Mom".

Especially when they were working, women felt the burden of having primary responsibility for their children. Aretha Washington, a native-born Black mother, said of the household division of labor with her husband, "(S)ometimes I pull most of the weight, especially with the boys…I would assume 98% of the responsibilities with my sons". Candy Springfield, a white mother of a preschooler, works as an office manager; her husband Ethan is unemployed. Although during the interview, Ethan claims to be a highly involved father, Candy is the one who responds to their daughter Dana every time Dana needs help or demands attention. Their daughter remains in daycare even though Ethan is at home during the day. Candy later writes in her Internet diary, "I am just soooo beat, and then in the morning Ethan can't even get up with us and that makes me sad sometimes, so I have to fix lunches for me and Dana and have to include a breakfast for Dana. It's just so hard". At the same time, many women, especially African, Caribbean and white women, were critical of other women who did not make parenting their primary responsibility. Tracy Buckley, from Africa, said, "we don't have to get so much caught up in the new millennium where women are getting equally paid and cross over to the other side where we actually forget what is the major role of a mother". To her and to others, nothing should even partially eclipse the importance of mothering, no matter what other responsibilities the mother might have.

When men played any role in childrearing, their contributions were usually referred to as "help" rather than responsibilities. In her Internet diary, Candy wishes for "a little help so I wouldn't have to do so much"; she still views parenting as her job even though her husband is not working. In fact, men were often given credit (by their wives or themselves) for any contribution they made to childrearing. Melea Spencer, who is native-born Black but is married to a man from Cameroon, told us that she was pleased that her husband is beginning to make "more efforts" in caring for their four-year-old. Quin Long, a native-born Black father, said he will take on childcare "when (my wife) is busy". Sometimes fathers were given credit just for their presence. Melea Spencer said, "Many people, especially in this country, they are parents without a father in the house. Having children and the father in the house, both parents, it makes it exciting for me". Women also questioned men's' parenting competence and engaged in gatekeeping [25], elevating their own responsibility with children and preventing their husbands from playing a primary role. Taylor McCoy, A Caribbean mother of four, explained why she could not take a job and leave her children with her husband: "Would he be able to stay home with the children and do the things I do? No...I wouldn't see the end of the week. My girls would probably he hanging by their toes somewhere".

Men did enjoy spending time with their children, and many specifically stated that doing so was important, especially white fathers and educated African fathers, who saw time with children as a meaningful addition to their role as providers. For instance, Kingston Kolfi, from the Ivory Coast, said of his role, "I should be the provider. Come home, happy to see my family (and) spend time with my family". Isaiah Scott, who is from Africa, told us he needed to balance his work with his family life: "I can make more money, but I can't have more than 24 hours. It is important that the children get everything from me in terms of time, warmth, and attention". Mike Thompson, a lower-income white husband who was anticipating a week of leave, said, "I don't get enough time with the baby, and I am going to take full advantage of this week to be with him". Fathers felt their children should know them as parents, even if they were not primary parents. As Mohammed Abbas, a store manager who emigrated from Central Asia, said, "When your child is 16 years old and someone says, 'tell me about your father'; 'I've barely seen him'—it shouldn't be that way".

At the same time, when men felt they were spending substantial time with children, many felt entitled to leisure time as compensation, a sentiment expressed by men of all backgrounds. Andrew Waller, a white father who does bookkeeping, began taking more responsibility for his two girls when his wife returned to school, and he would thus go out drinking on the weekends. Eric Varner, a native-born Black father of three daughters who works as a contract plumber and makes far less than his wife, a saleswoman, told us of his many nights out playing pool, that he needed "me time" and said, "I'm full of women in the house—I gotta breathe sometimes". When asked if his wife got "me time", he said she got it by spending time with their daughters. Women rarely felt entitled to time away from their children but usually accepted that their husbands did. As Mekelle Kolfi, who is from the Ivory Coast, said of going out without their baby, "I would stay and he would go, especially with the first [child]. I could not go out with the first one".

Many women felt ambivalent about spending any time away from their children, but expressed little or no concern if fathers were absent. Some Caribbean women took their children on months-long visits to relatives without involving the children's father. Many mothers, especially working-class mothers, expressed pride in not leaving their children with "just anybody". Aretha Washington told us, "Once we had (kids), it just stopped all fun time…'Cause anyone who knows me knows I'm not leaving my kids with anybody. I'm never that pressed to do nothing to pawn my children off". Reflecting the more communal orientation of African and Caribbean societies, in African and Caribbean immigrant families, though mothers were seen as essential, leaving a child with a female relative was often seen as near-equivalent to a mother's care. One Caribbean couple went so far as to leave their infant daughter with her grandmother in another state rather than keep her with them and use a daycare center. Several African women lamented that there were no relatives living nearby to help with childcare, and not having family-based care drove working African mothers to want to stay home to inculcate appropriate values.

Although most parents expressed a preference for family members providing childcare when it was needed, many parents we interviewed did use daycare centers or aftercare at their child's school. Many appeared neutral toward daycare even if they did not use it and discussed the downsides in terms of cost. As Jennifer Johnson, a native-born Black mother of three, told us, "After…having more kids, you realize that it was actually costly doing daycare, so I have pretty much been at home". She continues to substitute teach and to do home-based sales. Unlike white and immigrant Black parents, some

native-born Black parents expressed positive sentiments about daycare. Barry and Christine Adams, a lower-income, native-born Black couple, fantasized about an ideal marriage in which they would both come home from work and pick up their children from daycare. The Smiths explained that even when the mother went through a period of unemployment, they used daycare so their sons would be around other children.

Caribbean and white couples, especially lower-income white couples, were the most likely to express direct antipathy for daycare. For whites only, this meant that the mother herself, not even a family member, must care for the children. Meredith Kennedy, a white mother of three who once worked in a daycare center herself, said that kids "have the issues they have" when mothers work and children are in daycare. She went on to say, "The bond between children and their parents is important, and if women keep working, they are going to miss out on spending time with their child". She did not express concern about fathers missing opportunities to bond because they have to work—her husband works three nights a week as a bartender in addition to his regular full-time job. Mike Thompson said of his wife Laura, "I don't want her to go to work. I don't want the child in daycare". Laura said, "Daycare is something I'm not interested in….How do I give up my kids and give some stranger the pleasure of raising them? I can't bring myself to do it". Lower-income white families sometimes propelled themselves into near-poverty to avoid daycare. Melanie Greene, a white mother of three, said, "I feel like it's important that my children had them a mom and not a daycare provider, so we make sacrifices for that. I could go and put my kids in daycare and go to work, (but) the money is just not worth it". Her husband added, "I wouldn't pay $1000 for somebody to watch my kids", even though having Melanie at home means they have to rely on her parents for housing. Melanie notes that her mom is available to provide some care, but she is adamant about being home with the children herself.

4. Conclusions

Our research indicates that in few cases does any one social identity determine attitudes or values regarding childbearing and parenting. As noted by Collins [2] and others, race, class, and gender interact, and these intersections are important to consider rather than evaluating each category alone. We find that among Blacks in the United States, considering immigration is also important. Among the couples we interviewed, Caribbean and African immigrants had commonalities with whites as much or even more than with native-born Blacks. Class was important to consider as well, but social class impacted some racial-ethnic subgroups more than others. Men and women sometimes expressed similar values within or across other identities; in other cases, gender impacted values or practices differently depending on other social identities.

Some sentiments seemed divided by social class, but there was often variation by race and immigrant group in the mix. While childbearing outside of marriage appeared normative in lower-income families as a whole, childbearing within marriage held more importance for middle-income families. Middle-income white spouses expressed that becoming parents was a life cycle stage that was expected to occur after marriage, as when Allen Kennedy remarked, "Once you get married, it's, 'might as well have some kids'". The only couple who expressed stigma regarding their out-of-wedlock pregnancy were the white, college-educated Abbases, who rushed to marry as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed. Some middle-class Black parents experienced out-of-wedlock

pregnancies or had children with other people before meeting their spouses, and none seemed to find this remarkable. One African couple did say that they felt substantial pressure from their families to marry after they had a daughter together, but they were the only couple that mentioned family pressure to marry. Perhaps positioning themselves against the majority of Black parents in the United States and the Caribbeans who have children outside of marriage, middle-income, native-born Black and immigrant Caribbean couples sometimes expressed pride that their children were born within marriage. As Caribbean father Lamar Albright bragged, "We did everything right". Black spouses did not assume marriage before childbearing to be a norm, even if that was the trajectory they themselves had followed.

Attitudes toward childcare and mothering also had particular orientations depending on class, race, gender and immigration status. Lower-income white and Caribbean women in particular were often passionate about the importance of mothering as a wife's primary or sole occupation and expressed direct antipathy for daycare. Middle-income families of all backgrounds tended to be more neutral toward daycare, though some decried the expense and most families preferred to have family members as childcare providers. Native-born Black families had the most positive attitudes toward daycare. Some poor families saw it as aspirational because it would indicate the parents were employed and thus financially stable.

It is also important to consider structural impacts on families. The availability and expense of daycare shaped many families' perceptions on using it. The value placed on the nuclear family in the United States leads to structural conditions that are very different than those in Africa or the Caribbean, such as reliance on the welfare state instead of or in addition to family. In addition, Black men in particular were impacted by interactions with the penal system, which affected their employability. Few parenting values or concerns were unique to Black families, but incarceration was only expressed as a concern among Black families, primarily fathers, both native-born and immigrant. These men were primarily, but not all, from the lower-income strata, but all expressed that children were a motivator to avoid re-offending. Lower-income men, however, often associated prison records with employment difficulties, which they felt interfered with their obligations as fathers to provide. Research bears out that incarceration disproportionately affects black men. By the time they are in their early thirties, the age of most men in our sample, almost 60% of Black men who did not complete high school have spent time in prison [33], and having a record affects black men's' employment opportunities more than white men's [38]. We did interview two white husbands who had had encounters with the law, and one of them had served a prison term, but these men approached incarceration as a personal rather than systemic problem. None of the women we interviewed had spent time in prison, and their comments about the effects of incarceration on parenting regarded only fathers.

Most husbands and wives expressed the importance of the provider role to being a good father, even though many husbands had employment difficulties whether they had a prison record or not, and families in which the father was the sole provider were usually struggling financially. Some lower- and middle-income white and Caribbean wives viewed fathers' employment as obligatory and mothers' employment as morally questionable. African immigrant, native-born Black, and white men were the most likely to view spending time with children as an important value in addition to providing, though men sometimes felt entitled to personal leisure as compensation for this time. Among native-born

Black women, mothers' employment was seen as neutral or positive, and native-born Black women sometimes expressed that a breadwinner role could be elusive for Black men.

A few Black men indicated that society expected them to be providers even though, as Adam Garner asserted, "the female makes more than the male nine times out of ten". While the wives of these particular men did have steadier incomes, women in general are not out-earning men—only 22% of wives outearn their husbands [5]. The wage gap is narrowing, but among full-time, year-round workers, Black men average $664 per week, while Black women average $606 [37]. At all levels of educational attainment, Black men actually saw greater wage gains than Black women between 1970 and 2007. Though in the same time period, Black wives did increase in the share of household income they provided, on average it was still less than half at 47% [5]. Structural changes have led to shifts, including a decline in blue-collar jobs, a large increase in mothers' employment, and a rapid ascension of women in areas such as educational attainment [5] that can lead to a perception that women are outpacing men. In addition, more-equal employment and social opportunities for women in the United States over African and Caribbean countries may have led some immigrant Black men to perceive an overall advantage for women. White men never indicated that women had an economic advantage, even if that was the case in their own families, but the wage gap between white men and women is much larger than the gap for Blacks [37].

Because our research was an in-depth, qualitative study, our sample was relatively small, and drawing sweeping conclusions about any particular subgroup would not be credible. However, our research does indicate that examinations within demographic groups, especially pertaining to Black families in America, are crucial to understanding families. Caribbean and African immigrants come from different contexts. While they maintain practices and values from their home cultures, they also identify with different values and practices in the United States. Assimilation patterns may differ both between and within groups, and particularly for Africans, may vary by country or region of origin. Assimilation may also be different for immigrants who intermarry with the native-born, within or across racial lines. Our study was not longitudinal, and any discussion of changes in values among couples was retrospective. Among native-born Blacks, there are no universal values regarding parenting. Even considering social class is not sufficient to explain differences in parenting. Some values were common across groups, such as the centrality of children to family life, the primacy of mothering, or the importance of the provider role for fathers (even if parents were both employed). Values and practices cannot be assumed to be synonymous, and as noted in our limited observations, attitudes professed were not always enacted. Structural change also has the potential to reshape attitudes, values, and practices. With these considerations in mind, further research on Black families should take into account diversity among American Blacks in terms of not only gender and class, but also country of origin and other relevant social locations.

Acknowledgments

acknowledge the research assistance of Johns Hopkins sociology students, particularly Sika Koudou and Elizabeth Talbert.

Author Contributions

Caitlin Cross-Barnet wrote the manuscript. Both authors designed and conducted the research, developed the family profiles and coded the data.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Gadsden, V.; Davis, J.; Johnson, C. African American fathers and families within cultural perspective. In *Fathers across Cultures: The Importance, Roles, and Diverse Practices of Dads*; Roopnarine, J., Ed.; ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 2015; pp. 155–182.
2. Collins, P. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2000.
3. Child Trends Databank. Family Structure. Available online: http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators =family-structure (accessed on 7 November 2015).
4. Desilver, D. Who's Poor in America? 50 Years into the War on Poverty, a Data Portrait. Available online: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/13/whos-poor-in-america-50-years-into-the-war-on-poverty-a-data-portrait/ (accessed on 6 November 2015).
5. Fry, R.; Cohn, D. Women, Men, and the New Economics of Marriage. Available online: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/11/new-economics-of-marriage.pdf (accessed on 6 November 2015).
6. Anderson, M. A Rising Share of the U.S. Black Population Is Foreign Born. Available online: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/04/09/a-rising-share-of-the-u-s-black-population-is-foreign-born/ (accessed on 5 November 2015).
7. Lareau, A. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2003.
8. Estacion, A.; Cherlin, A. Gender distrust and intimate unions among low-income Hispanic and African American Women. *J. Fam. Issues* **2010**, *31*, 475–498.
9. Allen, W.; Olson, D. Five types of African-American marriages. *J. Marital Fam. Ther.* **2001**, *27*, 301–314.
10. Baumrind, D. Child care practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behavior. *Genet. Psychol. Monogr.* **1967**, *75*, 43–88.
11. Gray, M.; Steinberg, L. Unpacking authoritative parenting: Reassessing a multidimensional construct. *J. Marriage Fam.* **1999**, *61*, 574–587.
12. Kohn, M.L. *Class and Conformity: A Study in Values, with a Reassessment, 1977*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1977.

13. Cheadle, J.; Amato, P. A quantitative assessment of Lareau's qualitative Conclusions about class, race, and parenting. *J. Fam. Issues* **2011**, *32*, 679–706.

14. Bennett, P.; Lutz, A.; Jayaram, L. Beyond the schoolyard: The role of parenting logics, financial resources, and social institutions in the social class gap in structured activity participation. *Sociol. Educ.* **2012**, *85*, 131–157.

15. Wang, W. The Rise of Intermarriage: Rates, Characteristics Vary by Race and Gender. Available online: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/?src=prc-headline (accessed on 5 November 2015).

16. Smith, M. *Secular Faith: How Culture Has Trumped Religion in American Politics*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2015.

17. Cohn, D.; Livingston, G.; Wang, W. After Decades of Decline, a Rise in Stay-at-Home Mothers. Available online: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/04/08/chapter-4-public-views-on-staying-at-home-vs-working/ (accessed on 18 August 2015).

18. Martin, J., Hamilton, B., Osterman, M., Curtin, S.C., Mathews, T.J. (Eds.) *Births: Final data for 2013*; National Center for Health Statistics: Hyattsville, MD, USA, 2015.

19. McAdoo, H.; Younge, S. Black families. In *Handbook of African American Psychology*; Neville, H., Tynes, B., Ulsey, S., Eds.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2009; pp. 103–115.

20. Jacobsen, J.P. Labor force participation. *Q. Rev. Econ. Financ.* **1999**, *39*, 597–610.

21. Kent, M.M. Immigration and America's Black population. Available online: https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/catapanohis3208/files/2011/08/62.4immigration1.pdf (accessed on 16 August 2015).

22. Hao, L. *Color Lines, Country Lines: Race, Immigration, and Wealth Stratification in America*; Russell Sage Foundation: New York, NY, USA, 2007.

23. McAdoo, H.; Younge, S.; Getahun, S. Marriage and family socialization among Black Americans and Caribbean and African immigrants. In *The Other African Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States*; Shaw-Taylor, Y., Tuch, S.A., Eds.; Rowan and Littlefield: Lanham, MD, USA, 2007; pp. 93–116.

24. Roopnarine, J. Fathers in Caribbean cultural communities. In *Fathers in Cultural Context*; Shwalb, D., Shwalb, B., Lamb, M., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2013; pp. 203–227.

25. Allen, S.; Hawkins, A. Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *J. Marital Fam. Ther.* **1999**, *61*, 199–212.

26. Nyarko, K. Childrearing, motherhood, and fatherhood in Ghana. In *Parenting across Cultures: Childrearing, Motherhood and Fatherhood in Non-Western Cultures*; Selin, H., Ed.; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014; pp. 231–239.

27. Roopnarine, J.; Hossain, Z. African American and African Caribbean fathers. In *Handbook of Father Involvement*; Cabrera, N., Tamis-LeMonda, C., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2013; pp. 223–243.

28. Anderson, P.; Daley, C. African-Caribbean fathers: The conflict between masculinity and fathering. In *Fathers across Cultures: The Importance, Roles, and Diverse Practices of Dads*; Roopnarine, J., Ed.; ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 2015; pp. 13–38.

29. Sudarkasa, N. Conceptions of motherhood in nuclear and extended families, with special reference to comparative studies involving African societies. Available online: http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/jenda/article/view/94 (accessed on 18 April 2015).

30. Mwoma, T. Fathering in Kenya. In *Fathers across Cultures: The Importance, Roles, and Diverse Practices of Dads*; Roopnarine, J., Ed.; ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 2015; pp. 410–428.

31. Wadende, P.; Fite, K.; Lasser, K. The Kenyan parent in changing times. In *Parenting across Cultures: Childrearing, Motherhood and Fatherhood in Non-Western Cultures*; Selin, H., Ed.; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014; pp. 267–276.

32. Pedulla, D.; Thebaud, S. Can we finish the revolution? Gender, work-family ideals, and institutional constraint. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* **2015**, *80*, 116–139.

33. Western, B. *Punishment and Inequality in America*; Russell Sage: New York, NY, USA, 2006.

34. Raley, R.; Bumpass, L. The topography of the divorce plateau: Levels and trends in union stability in the United States after 1980. *Demogr. Res.* **2003**, *8*, 245–260.

35. Strauss, A.; Corbin, J. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 1998.

36. Edin, K.; Kefalas, M. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage, with a New Preface*; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2011.

37. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Highlights of women's earnings in 2013. BLS Reports, 2014. Available online: http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/cps/highlights-of-womens-earnings-in-2013.pdf (accessed on 17 August 2015).

38. Pager, D. *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2007.