

Traditional Parental Roles are Changing

By Jazelle Hunt  
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – A cache of new research from the Pew Center paints a picture of the modern American family—a picture in which the historically rigid roles and responsibilities of moms and dads are meeting in the middle.

But that picture has always been a bit different for Black moms and dads, and the ways this cultural shift is unfolding reflects those differences.

“As such roles change, African Americans are included too,” says George Garrow Jr., executive director of Concerned Black Men. The nonprofit seeks to uplift children and families by building Black male role models.

“I would point out there’s an uncounted group of fathers who are staying at home with their children, or they have custody,” Garrow continues. “We focus so much on

doubled since 1989, with 2 million fathers comprising 16 percent of stay-at-home parents, up from 10 percent in 1989.

Now, 50 percent of working fathers—more than ever before—report the same “work-life balance” challenges that working moms have decried for so long. The challenge is stemming from changing attitudes around the meaning of fatherhood.

“Our fatherhood program tries to teach that their role as a father does not hinge completely on the financial contributions. Your child needs emotional, psychological support as well,” Garrow says. “Those we are helping to reconnect [with their children], we help them appreciate that...the [lack of] ability to provide is no reason to step away from your family.”

Garrow touches upon a gloomy Pew finding: While fathers are beginning to redefine fatherhood beyond bringing home the bacon, there are also fewer fathers (of all races) coming home at all.



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In fact, those dads are now being counted. According to Pew research, Black fathers account for 16 percent of stay-at-home dads, and 9 percent of fathers who both work and live with all their children. The number of stay-at-home dads has nearly

One paper reports that 27 percent of all fathers live apart from at least one of their children. For Black men, that figure is 44 percent. Further, 55 percent of Black children were living in a single-parent home, according to 2011 Census data.

At the same time, Black fathers who live apart from their children are the most likely of all dads outside the home to see their child at least monthly (67 percent do), and most likely to talk to their child several

times a week about their day (49 percent).

Garrow says that the reasons behind absentee fathers in the Black community are often overlooked.

“Rarely do you see...fathers who just feel like, ‘I don’t want to be a father, I don’t have desire to be in my kids life,’” he explains. “There are a number of reasons they step away, and a big one is they don’t want to be there if they can’t provide economic support. Sometimes [their child’s mother] may feel this way, too.”

The shift in attitudes and norms is affecting moms, too.

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Black children are least likely to grow up with a stay-at-home mom (23 percent, compared to 37 percent for Asians, 36 percent for Latinos, and 26 percent for Whites). This is likely because egalitarian views about breadwinning are not new for African Americans.

“According to the survey, blacks are far more likely than whites to see earning a living as a top responsibility of dads and moms. Fully half (51 percent) of blacks say providing income is “extremely important” for fathers compared with 40 percent of whites,” say the researchers. Black respondents felt the responsibility was just as great for mothers, compared to 21 percent of Whites who agreed.

The changes in family roles are also reflected in public attitudes, although the attitudes seem to be changing more slowly. For example, 58 percent of respondents believe that the ideal situation for kids is to have a working mother—though most (42 percent) believe that she should only work part-time. In reality, moms are the breadwinners in 40 percent of households.

“[T]here are also some differences in the way the public weighs the roles of mothers and fathers, especially when it comes to being an income provider,” says one report. “Just 25 percent of survey respondents say this is an extremely important role for mothers, compared with 41 percent who feel that way about fathers.”

Interestingly, public policy doesn’t seem to be keeping up with the times, according to Garrow.

“Our social system is not making it particularly easy for fathers to receive assistance, for example, if they’re the single head of their household. And a lot of our fathers have complained...when there’s custody disputes, their input or response is not considered by judges,” he says. “But when we bring fathers back into their child’s lives they are sharing roles in raising their child. It’s always collaborative.”

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