

Introduction

The Fatherhood Involvement campaign highlights the diverse experiences of real dads who share a commitment to being there for their kids through parenting highlights and challenges. By acknowledging the hard work they put forth in the face of hardships, the campaign seeks to provide all fathers with confidence to keep going in their efforts to be present for their children (Ad Council, 2021). The Fatherhood Involvement health campaign has several sponsors, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families, Ad Council, and National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. Agencies affiliated with the campaign include Amazon Studios, WWE, Campbell Ewald, Wondros. Overall, the Fatherhood Involvement campaign is a community built around the theme of “dadication,” which is the notion that dads are committed to being present despite the obstacles they face.

Health Topic Description and Audience Analysis

The Fatherhood Involvement campaign broadly focuses on the topic of social health and specifically addresses the parent-child relationship by recommending that fathers show up and be present for their children. Children and families stand to benefit from the recommended behaviors of father involvement. In addition to having an involved mother, children who grow up with an involved father have stronger cognitive and motor skills, enjoy elevated levels of physical and mental health, become better problem-solvers, and are more confident, curious, and empathetic. They also show greater moral sensitivity and self-control (Ad Council, 2021). As they continue to grow up, “well-fathered children” are substantially less likely to be sexually involved at an early age, have babies out of wedlock, or be involved in criminal or violent behavior; they are also much more likely to stay and do well in school, and go to college (Ad

Council, 2021). Broadly speaking, positive father care is associated with more pro-social behavior, empathy, and independence in both girls and boys (Ad Council, 2021).

Additionally, the Fatherhood Involvement Campaign acknowledged on their platform that early efforts sought to support young, primarily low-income men as they struggled with parenting and financial issues. In recent years, though, the responsible fatherhood field has expanded beyond its roots in employment and parenting services for low-income fathers to recognize the diverse needs of a wide array of fathers. Programs now include elements such as healthy marriage and co-parenting skills training, general fatherhood competency for all income levels, support for fathers involved with the child welfare and criminal justice systems, a focus on children's education and literacy, awareness of the needs of fathers who have children with special needs, and attention to issues of domestic violence, which all expand the range of benefits these services can have.

Fathers who co-parent, or are part of a two-parent household, that come from a Caucasian background are likely to already be participating in the recommended behaviors of the campaign; additionally, neighborhoods that have a high concentration of families with fathers are likely to be sending messages of their active involvement in their children's lives. Individuals from these contexts are likely to be involved because these families tend to have the shared income of both parents and thus, better access to resources important for childrearing; additionally, children coming from two-parent households are also exposed to both father- and mother-love, which has been shown to be two qualitatively different types of love that each bring unique contributions to the job of parenting (Ad Council, 2021).

On the other hand, households led by a single mother, families that come from different cultures or have extenuating circumstances, such as having a father incarcerated, and

neighborhoods with high concentrations of fatherless families are likely not to be directly involved in this campaign's behaviors. For example, 66% of African American children and 35% of Hispanic children live apart from their biological fathers, compared to 27% of white children. Single mothers are the primary caregivers in 84 percent of all single-parent families (Ad Council, 2021). While race is an important factor to keep in mind when considering which children and families are impacted most by a lack of fatherhood involvement, ultimately, if a father is absent in *any* context, it can have negative consequences for children: "A white teenage girl from an advantaged background is five times more likely to become a teen mother if she grows up in a single-mother household than if she grows up in a household with both biological parents, and the likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of fatherless families" (Ad Council, 2021). It is possible that individuals coming from these backgrounds are not involved because there are different cultural beliefs surrounding the importance of the nuclear family, making two-parent households more of a rare exception, rather than the expected norm. Having the skills, knowledge, or wherewithal to parent successfully and the ability to provide the parental, economic, or household stability a child needs to flourish are all the most important factors to fathers and their children and families; these are also the same factors that tend to be disproportionately limited by access or systematic influences for individuals from these demographic groups. Regardless of background, though, a childrearing environment that has prominent messages of a lack of healthy male role models and economic stability can lead children to seek out paths of escapism through drugs, alcohol, and sex, among many other things, which can tear apart marriages and families.

The target audience for this campaign is fathers, broadly speaking. But, if the audience was one person, they would identify as male, be named Zeke, and come from an African American family. Zeke is living separately from his biological family and works at a restaurant as a waiter in order to make ends meet; he hasn't seen his children in several years. It is important to Zeke that his children know that he still thinks of them even though he doesn't see them every day. He feels positively about his involvement in their lives when his children were younger and believes he did a good job of encouraging their interests when he still lived with them in the same house; for example, he took his daughter to dance lessons and practiced with her at home, and he also encouraged his son to try out for the theatre club at school and would help him memorize his lines. However, he feels negatively about his involvement with his children's lives now that he is separated from them and is unsure of how he can remain a parental figure to them, or if it is too late to repair his relationships, since it has been several years. Zeke doesn't have a lot of access to technological resources because he often finds himself living paycheck-to-paycheck; however, he uses the public library's computers often.

According to the Health Belief Model, which proposes that people make behavioral choices based on a variety of factors (DuPré & Overton, 2021), Zeke may face low motivation in response to the Fatherhood Involvement campaign because he has uncertainty about his level of self-efficacy to change his situation and because he faces several obstacles in terms of contacting his previous partner and his children. Similarly, because Zeke is separated from his partner and children, there is an implicit institutional rule that he remains absent from their lives because it is more socially acceptable for the female partner to take care of the children both during and after separation. Zeke faces a variety of environmental factors that make it difficult to navigate the logistics of seeing his children, such as transportation and redefining the norms surrounding his

relationship with his family post-separation, as well as internal factors, such as feelings of uncertainty and nervousness about reaching out to them again, which ultimately come to influence his behavior; this is an example consistent with Social Cognitive Theory because environmental and internal factors will influence Zeke's actual behavior, no matter how well-intentioned he is: even if Zeke really wants to reconnect with his family, he is driven by what he thinks and feels but also by what is perceived to be socially acceptable (DuPré & Overton, 2021), which could convince him that he probably should not make an effort. Therefore, while individuals who identify with Zeke's background and story are those who would benefit most from the resources this health campaign provides, these individuals are also likely to face unique barriers that stand in their way from obtaining social support that could benefit them and their families.

Channels of Communication

(PSA)

The #Dadication: Hotel Transylvania PSA captures the attention of viewers by pairing important and deep themes about fatherhood involvement with a fun and cute cartoon. The PSA is very effective at communicating the main message that being a dad can be transformative, but it can also be a lot of fun; it communicates this by pairing scenes throughout the PSA with four main pieces of advice for fathers to "prepare their little monsters for the outside world," which include: encouraging their interest, supporting their growth, walking them through new relationships, and preparing them to stand on their own two feet. The PSA uses information about the importance of creating a nurturing environment filled with encouragement to help the audience (fathers) to understand that supporting their child(ren)'s growth every step of the way will help them discover a new world of possibilities. This PSA is consistent with the other #Dadication PSAs, which all put forth the same, clear message that parents and families are

facing new challenges, but one thing that hasn't changed is the importance of dads being involved in their children's lives; the congruity across PSA videos makes the topic of fatherhood involvement, and why it's important, easily accessible for the audience to understand and identify with life experiences they may share in common. The PSA motivates viewers to seek out additional information by including the website name Fatherhood.gov, as well as the National Responsible Father Clearinghouse logo, at the end of the PSA; this gives viewers access to where they can find similar resources and content.

(Online Platform)

The user experience has the potential to be as broad or specific as each viewer wants due to the search function, as well as the opportunity to sign up for email updates and explore important topics. Navigating the interactive platform can be overwhelming at first, especially for a new user because there are a lot of resources available. While the platform does a good job at including information for "special cases," one of the drawbacks of the user experience is that viewers have to really dig to find resources if they are a part of a unique population, such as young fathers, dads with children who have special needs, those involved with the child welfare system, incarcerated and reentering fathers, and non-residential fathers; these resources are located on a side bar under the "For programs" tab under the "Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit," however, they would be better suited potentially on the main page, where viewers can immediately tailor their search and see representation based on their life experiences.

Despite this, the online platform is organized in a relatively helpful way once users understand where to find information. The platform provides information to its audience through the seven main tabs across the top of the webpage, which direct users to find further information on the platform. For example, the "Home" tab gives an overview of the information available;

the “For dads” tab gives activity suggestions for fathers to do with their kids as well as dad jokes, and it also explains the Dadication PSA; the “For programs” tab explains the history of the field, how to plan a program, tips for practitioners, and also gives viewers access to the Fatherhood Media campaign where viewers can explore and download all the PSAs; the “events” tab gives information on upcoming conferences and webinars; the “Program Map” allows viewers to find a fatherhood program in their own community; the “Research and Resources” tab gives multimedia resources through a variety of different means, such as audio, print or video; lastly, the “Dadtalk blog” allows fathers a space to voice their insights with the goal of starting conversations about important issues surrounding fatherhood and programs for fathers today. Overall, this is an effective method to organize information because it guides and streamlines viewers’ search to what is most relevant to them by directing the audience to resources on parenting tips, fatherhood programs, or any other information they may be interested in, which can all be found through one platform.

The information available on the interactive platform generally feels complete and informative because of the vast array of topics and resources that the website addresses. The information that is most compelling is that which is found under the Dadtalk blog, where awareness is brought to users’ unique stories, such as the insights of a child coping with their father’s absence, or how a child found their father through online DNA matching; this section also acknowledges prevalent issues that often do not get enough attention, such as breast cancer in men, how a father can navigate being a parental figure after divorce, or how to manage parental burnout. The Dadtalk blog section is especially profound for these reasons because it gives users the space to discuss what may be considered nuanced topics to outsiders but to do so within the space of a supportive and nonjudgmental community. The blog posts also motivate

users to interact with one another and continue communication by sharing their stories.

Additionally, the social media resources allow users to connect via Facebook and Twitter and also by using the #MakeAMoment. Under the “About Us” tab on the page’s top right, users can find contact information to reach out via email, telephone, fax, or postal mail to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, which encourages users to establish a dialogue with any questions or insights they have. Lastly, the platform has an option to view it in Spanish, which motivates users to interact with the content if this is their first language, which I think is a very beneficial and noteworthy feature, especially in relation to the demographic information of fathers that would typically seek out these resources.

(Both PSA and Online Platform)

Overall, I think the PSAs and the online platform work well together to promote the larger health topic of parental relationships and the importance of fatherhood involvement within the context of social health. They do this by making sure that all their public service announcements and resources contribute to the overarching message that responsible fatherhood is about being present and making time for their kids throughout the challenges of parenthood. The narrative that they are creating is one that advocates for the involvement of fathers for the benefit of their children and their families, but the campaign also implicitly sends the message that fathers benefit from personally identifying with the mission to show up for their kids; this narrative is created by the platform’s inclusion of “proof” through publishing stories on the blog that emphasize the impact that fathers’ involvement has on the lives of children and families in order to “convince” fathers of their importance. The campaign offers a compelling and creative take on parental relationships and social health, broadly, by meeting fathers where they are, no matter what unique situation they may find themselves in, and using accessible language and

entertaining videos to explain serious topics; I think the platform does a really admirable job at not sugar-coating the challenges that fathers face within different contexts, while also creating the space for open dialogue about important issues that affect parental and familial relationships that aren't as common place to discuss or find resources on, such as healthcare access barriers, financial literacy, preventing child abuse and neglect.

While inclusion of adoptive families is present on the platform through the "Research and Resources" tab under the library search function, I think this population deserves more representation on the platform overall; since information on this population is difficult to find, it gives the impression that the health campaign is primarily focused on providing resources and bringing awareness to the experiences of biological fathers. The Fatherhood Involvement campaign can better reach and include adoptive fathers by including a section under the "For programs" tab under the "Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit," where some of the other diverse populations have their resources. Furthermore, the platform could also amplify the voices of adoptive fathers on the "Dadtalk" blog so that viewers, and even other fathers, can educate themselves more about this particular life experience and the complexities that come with it.

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a client centered process in which an interviewer helps someone explore and resolve ambivalence about a decision, while respecting the individual's freedom of choice (DuPré & Overton, 2021). The Fatherhood Involvement campaign could create lasting change by implementing MI through providing access to professionals who could contact fathers and help them to want to take personal responsibility for continuing to maintain their relationship with their child(ren) by showing them the impact they can have by doing so. Motivational interviewing could serve as a means of preventative care, which gives individuals the tools and resources they need to manage their health because taking active steps to protect

against negative outcomes is important for social health as well. On a holistic level, fatherhood involvement is impacted by the mutual influences of individuals' physical characteristics and personal choices, social variables, and culture, which is consistent with the sociocultural model (DuPré & Overton, 2021). Framing the conversation of this health campaign within this theoretical context allows us to appreciate the variety of backgrounds and life experiences that fathers who seek these resources may come from, as well as the complex and systematic influences on their likelihood to having access to additional resources.

Conclusion

Father absence can have a substantial impact on child well-being and taking intentional, active steps to be present and show up for their children can serve as a buffer against negative outcomes associated with cognitive and motor delays, as well as participation in risky behaviors. Unfortunately, not having the skills, knowledge, stability, or economic means to parent successfully are all barriers to fatherhood involvement. However, parenthood, and specifically fatherhood, has the potential to be transformative not only for children but for the overall health of parents as well. Fatherhood involvement is an enormously important public health campaign that impacts society at large and has numerous ripple effects for other aspects of social and developmental health; so, it is crucial that dads understand the tremendous impact that showing up every day can have, how these benefits can extend beyond their own family unit, and that they continue to have access to resources which help them do this. Afterall, the social health of a community starts with health at the individual and familial levels.

References

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