

## I am simply Moore

Written by Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT  
Tuesday, 14 May 2013 13:49

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On May 5, while some were out celebrating Cinco de Mayo, I was at home preparing a syllabus for a course I am teaching this summer.

How ironic, my last column discussed rapper DMX and his battle with addiction, and this summer I am teaching a course on addictions within families. While developing assignments, I tuned in to the cable channel OWN, which presented what I thought was a powerful discussion regarding men who grow up as "fatherless sons." I have to weigh in on this topic, as it is something that I know about all too well.

Before I give you "Dr. Moore's" perspective, I do want to offer one critique of this particular episode. While I think it was great and it helped to open up a discussion that we need to have in order for us to start focusing in on solutions, what personally bothered me was that Oprah Winfrey failed to include a male mental health expert to discuss this topic. Someone please tell Oprah to call my cell phone. Seriously speaking, I just think the conversation would have been slightly different if a strong male mental health professional was involved in the show and actually assisted Oprah with facilitating this much needed discussion.

This is no jab at Iyanla Vanzant, but she is a female.

While Iyanla did draw from her personal experience of having a brother who negatively coped with growing up as a fatherless son, she does not know what it fundamentally means to be male and she has never walked a day in a male's shoes. I (as someone who grew up as a fatherless son) would have preferred a male expert to discuss this topic. I am not saying that women have no place in this discussion, because they absolutely do. I am simply saying that for me, I would have appreciated if Oprah had Iyanla sit this one out and had Roland Warren (from the national fatherhood initiative) come out of the audience and sit on the stage. Since when, did women become the experts on manhood, male identity, and masculinity? When do men define their own experience, their own perspectives, and develop their own solutions? But ... I guess this is what we are talking about, when men leave the home willingly, when they no longer fill the role of being a father, women do become the experts on all things male. So perhaps Oprah was simply depicting the harsh realities of society by having two female matriarchs facilitate a discussion on healing men. How interesting.

Nevertheless, they did a nice job. I do think it is worth mentioning that I stated "men who willingly" left the home. I want to be clear to make this distinction, because if we add the topic of race and class to this discussion, one must include a historical analysis regarding the plight of the African-American male and the Black family system. I am sure you do not need a history lesson regarding all the institutions (figuratively *and* literally as in the prison system) that have been set in place to break down the African-American family. However, if you do need a reminder turn on the news, go to the library (it's free) or take a class from my former advisor, Dr. Rose Brewer, at the University of Minnesota (she is dynamic, I am sure she will bring you up to speed).

With that being said, I want to say that it is critically important for fathers to be involved in their children's lives, and especially in the lives of men, and even more especially in the lives of African-American men. I could write an entire book about my experience of growing up as a

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fatherless son ... and maybe I will someday. What you should know is that the absence of my father fundamentally shaped who I am; the good, the bad, and the ugly. My personality, my identity, my experience of the world is a direct response to growing up as a fatherless son. One of the things I thought was powerful was when Mr. Warren stated, "it is difficult to be what you don't see."

Just the other day I was communicating with my aunt (the other Dr. Moore) about some of my experiences of growing up as a fatherless son and how it has impacted my life and my development as a Black male. There are several things that have been omitted from my life that others may take for granted. For example, I, Darren D. Moore, a 29-year-old African-American male with a Ph.D., to this day, do not know how to change a tire on a car. Are there classes that one can take to learn this skill? How was I supposed to learn to change a tire? My mother never taught me. What I did learn is that it is always important to have an account with AAA and to call them if I have a flat tire.

While this may seem like a small issue, it is really connected to dominant notions of masculinity. Luckily, I have a wonderful woman, but could you imagine me approaching a lady and asking her out on a date and having to say, "Hey lady I would love to take you out, but just so you know, if we get a flat tire I won't be able to help you out."

This may sound hilarious and I even laugh about it sometimes myself (you have to laugh sometime to keep from crying) but that does not fit into this overarching perspective of men being "the protectors" of women.

Let's be honest here. I do not know an African-American woman on the north side of Minneapolis that would date a man who does not know how to change a tire on a car. If I am wrong, ladies, please let me know. We say that men have this built in instinct to be protectors, but sometimes I question that perspective. Perhaps that is supposed to be the purpose of man, to protect his family, but when men grow up as fatherless sons, and/or are not socialized to be protectors, then they fail at performing manhood by society's standards. If this is so, then my maleness and my masculinity are brought into question. It is a lot deeper than you think. I could give you lots of other examples, and maybe I will at a later time.

While I grew up as a fatherless son, I had many mothers (mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, you name it). Oh my goodness, I have been surrounded by women. While I love each and every one of them, it sometimes was a bit much. And while they did the best they could, they could not teach me everything. Some things I had to learn from friends. Some things I had to learn from the media. Thinking back on my childhood, who was I supposed to talk to about dating women, about sex, about why it is important as a male to let women walk on the inner part of the side walk, while I walk closest to the curb? Who was I supposed to talk to about being a man and about being a gentleman? Who was supposed to teach me about the importance of getting out of a car and offering to pump the gas, if I am in a car full of women? It is one thing for a mother to tell a fatherless son to take out the trash or pump the gas, but it is another thing to see a father or a strong male figure actually do these things.

Another piece of the OVN show was part of a discussion about how men cope with being

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fatherless sons. Many men wonder what they did to cause their father to leave. I myself am included. I thought if I could just be famous, maybe my father would love me or if I could become a multi-millionaire, maybe, just maybe he will come around. Me being a serious academic, graduating from high school at the age of 16, getting my bachelor's degree at 20, going on to get my master's and Ph.D., is directly related to my desire and need of approval from my father – my need to be viewed as important, as worthy, as significant. It just so happened that I turned to academics to get attention. Others may turn to drugs, crime, unprotected sex, fathering children with no commitment, among other things. I'd trade my Ph.D. for my father any day.

Another aspect as it relates to my experience is around identity. Sometimes I wonder who am I. Not only did I grow up a fatherless son, I do not really know my father's side of the family. I have cousins, uncles and aunts all through Minneapolis; and let's be honest, none of them really reached out to me during my childhood. Everyone knows who I am on the north side of Minneapolis. They know that although my last name is Moore and I embrace that with a passion, my last name is really supposed to be Banks. Enough said about that. My point for saying this is not to put the Banks family on blast, my point is that even if a father does not step up, this should not deter extended family from stepping in. I wonder how my life would be different if I did not grow up as a fatherless son and/or if I was involved with my father's side of the family.

My father died a couple of years ago and I did not go to the funeral. At that point in my life I was not ready to forgive, and even to this day I do not regret my decision for not attending. It is what it is. In my mind, at the time I was thinking, I don't even know you. Who are you? What is your favorite color? So I did not go to the funeral for that reason, in addition to some other reasons. However, at some point, I had to "let go and let God." That's right, I had to give it over to God. As a Christian, I had to find it in my heart to forgive. I had to forgive in my own way. It is so hard to forgive someone, especially when they have never apologized or never acknowledged the pain that they have caused you. However, forgiveness is important for a person to be able to heal and move on in his or her life.

In addition, I also had to change my language, my viewpoint, and my perspective. I did not grow up a fatherless son – I have a father, and his name is *Jesus*.

I am not a victim. I am not even a survivor. I am simply *Moore*. I am *Moore* than my predicament,  
than my problems, and  
*Moore*

*Moore*

than the little boy inside of me that always longed for a relationship with my biological father. I encourage all of you who grew up without your biological fathers to forgive (I did not say forget). I encourage you to work hard to become something in life, despite your experiences. I encourage you to break the cycle that has plagued many of us in the African-American community. I encourage you to raise your children and nurture them. I encourage you to be

*Moore*

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*Moore*

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, live  
Moore  
, and have  
Moore  
. Stick around, there's  
Moore  
to come.

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