

BRINGING FATHERS INTO F.O.C.U.S.: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FATHERS  
WHO COMPLETED A COMMUNITY BASED FATHERHOOD PROGRAM

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## DEDICATION

For my hunk of a husband, Michael; my marvelous son Miles; and my charismatic daughter Camille, thank you for hanging in there with me during this journey. I appreciate the hugs, kisses, candy, and most of all love.

For my grandfather, John L. Law. Your legacy lives in me.

For the fathers in this study, thank you for trusting me with your stories.

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## ABSTRACT

FELICIA LAW MURRAY

### BRINGING FATHERS INTO F.O.C.U.S: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FATHERS WHO COMPLETED A COMMUNITY BASED FATHERHOOD PROGRAM

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of fathers who were formally involved in the public child welfare system and completed a community based fatherhood program. Using symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model as theoretical frameworks, the study explored the following issues: (1) fathers' role perceptions; (2) fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitated and/or hindered father involvement; and (3) fathers' perceptions of the impact of the fatherhood program on the father-child relationship, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors.

Ten semi-structured interviews were performed with participants who completed a fatherhood program conducted by a family services agency in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Data gathered from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and synthesized via first and second cycle coding. Holistic, initial, as well as emotion and values coding were used for first cycle coding. Focused coding was used for second cycle coding. Peer debriefing and member checks were used to ensure trustworthiness.

Thick rich descriptions and verbatim texts were used to capture the essence of participants' experiences. Three main themes emerged from the data: Physical and Emotional Presence, Challenges, and Adaptability. Physical and Emotional Presence referenced the role and impact of fathers' physical presence in their children's lives and their commitment to provide emotional support for their children. The discourse for the theme Challenges represented the myriad obstacles participants encountered which impacted father involvement. Lastly, Adaptability related to the fatherhood program impact on fathers' role perceptions, the father-child relationship, and fathering behaviors. Study limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research are also presented.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Father involvement within the public child welfare system (CWS) and Child Protective Services (CPS) has garnered increased attention over the past couple of decades (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012; Zanoni, Warburton, Bussey, & McMaugh, 2014). Key stakeholders agree father engagement and involvement are critical issues that can promote child safety (Gordon, Oliveros, Hawes, Iwamoto, & Rayford, 2012; Scourfield, 2006) and positive child development (Carlson, 2006; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Lamb, 2010; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). As such, children with actively involved fathers are more likely to reunite with their family following removal due to child abuse or neglect, and remain in foster care for shorter time periods (Coakley, 2008, 2013a). Moreover, the presence of involved, non-violent fathers positively impacts the father-child and co-parenting relationships (Gordon et al., 2012). Despite said evidence, child welfare services primarily cater to the needs of mothers (Huebner, Werner, Hartwig, White, & Shewa, 2008; O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, & Thornton, 2005; Scott & Crooks, 2007), while circumventing father-centered practices in service engagement and service delivery (Brown, Callahan, Strega, Walmsley, & Dominelli, 2009; Dominelli, Strega, Walmsley, Callahan, & Brown, 2011; Zanoni, Warburton, Bussey, & McMaugh, 2013). Consequently, fathering experiences in

child welfare remain underrepresented in the literature (Brown et al., 2009); thus, the nature of this inquiry.

Previous studies suggest that fathers require parenting interventions that address their unique needs (Gordon et al., 2012; O'Donnell et al., 2005; Saleh, 2013; Zaroni et al., 2013), specifically accounting for cultural and societal influences that impact their fathering behaviors (Dubowitz, 2006; Saleh, 2013). As such, Masciadrelli, Pleck, and Stueve (2006) found that fathers who experienced difficulty conceptualizing paternal roles, including societal expectations about their roles, struggled to meet their children's needs. General parenting education or support courses may not discuss these targeted issues. However, federal initiatives have led to father-centered programs (Bronte-Tinkew, Bowie, & Moore, 2007) that provide parent and relationship training, and employment assistance among other relevant supports (Sylvester & Reich, 2002). These programs endeavor to modify maladaptive parenting behaviors (Barth, 2009), alleviate the issue of child maltreatment (Barth 2009), and encourage non-resident fathers to actively involve themselves with their children (Sylvester & Reich, 2002). Although the number of father-centered programs has increased, little is known about how they beget sustained father-child relationships (Gordon et al., 2012; Sylvester & Reich, 2002). Data are limited that examine post-intervention parenting behaviors for fathers once involved with a child welfare system, a matter explored in this inquiry.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Public child welfare agencies, (e.g. CPS), operate alongside the family or juvenile court to investigate and adjudicate cases of child abuse and/or neglect. Children and their families come to CPS' attention due to a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; neglect; domestic violence; substance use and/or addiction; and mental illness (Cameron, Coady, & Hoy, 2014). In 2014, nearly 3.25 million U.S. children were subjects of a child abuse investigation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Of those investigations, 702,208 (21.6%) cases were substantiated (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016) described mothers (40.7%) as the primary perpetrators and fathers (20.5%) as the secondary perpetrators (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Nationally, nearly 75% of child maltreatment cases were substantiated for child neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Recent child abuse and/or neglect figures in Texas were stark as well. In 2014, 7.2 million children resided in the state (TXDFPS, 2016). Approximately 290,474 children were subjects of child abuse investigations (TXDFPS, 2016). Of this number, 66,721 (23%) abuse allegations were substantiated (TXDFPS, 2016). Hispanic children had the highest rates of victimization (n=29,236) followed by white children (n=21,546), African American children (n=11,726), other (n=2,293), Asian children (n=402), and Native American children (n=80). According to 2014 data, Region 3 of the Texas Department of

Family and Protective Services (Collin, Dallas, Denton, and Tarrant counties) comprised 1,979,195 children, the largest child population in Texas. During the same year, there were 20,872 substantiated allegations of child abuse in Region 3, the largest number of substantiated abuse cases in the state at that time (TXDFPS, 2016).

Federal law asserts that both parents must receive intervention services in cases of child maltreatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). Yet, child welfare interventions often focus primarily on mothers, even when fathers are present in the home and/or involved with their children (Brodie, Paddock, Gilliam, & Chavez, 2014; Strega, Brown, Callahan, Dominelli, & Walmsley, 2009). Empirical studies on fathers involved in the child-welfare system are limited to caseworker opinions (Malm, Murray, & Geen, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2005) or surveys of agency files (Brown et al., 2009; Coakley, 2008, 2013a). Findings indicated that caseworkers labeled fathers as hard to engage in services (Hueber et al., 2008), uninvolved (Zanoni et al., 2013) or they were not identified in case records (Zanoni et al., 2013); thus, rendering them as nonviable candidates for custody considerations (Coakley, 2013a). While sparse research efforts address the fathers' child-welfare system involvement, there is a dearth of literature regarding fathers' expressed experiences with interventions (Cameron et al., 2014; Grief, Finney, Greene-Joyner, Minor, & Stitt, 2007) and practices (Brown et al., 2009; Dominelli et al., 2011; Strega et al., 2008).

Parenting programs have benefitted fathers and children (Byrne, Salmela-Aro, Read, & Rodrigo, 2013); yet, engaging fathers to participate in these programs remains

challenging (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudry, 2009). Even when involved with their children, fathers are more difficult to recruit for CPS referred services (Zanoni et al., 2014). Additionally, father absence remains an issue in public child welfare with many children having limited (Coakley, 2013a; Coady, Hoy, & Cameron, 2013; Malm, 2003) to no contact with their biological fathers (Coakley, 2013a). Furthermore, Brown et al. (2009) suggested that child welfare agencies' practices and policies promote the notion of the uninvolved father, which may also impact the father-child relationship and father involvement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Qualitative data are limited that illuminate fathers' perceptions about their family role, factors that facilitate and/or hinder their involvement with their children, and the impact of interventions on current functioning with their children. Thus, the goal of this current study is to gain further insight into fathers' perceptions about the (a) role of fathers, (b) factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement, and (c) impact of a community based fatherhood intervention program on the father role perceptions, father-child relationship, and fathering behaviors. Understanding fathers' shared and expressed experiences can increase awareness of factors that contribute to father involvement. This study is significant because it fills an important literature gap, and offers a specific view of fathering experiences—one within the realm of parenting interventions and fatherhood programs. Furthermore, this study provides data which can inform current practice in fatherhood programs and public child welfare.



### **Significance of the Study**

Generally, parenting interventions play a critical role in promoting overall health and safety of children, particularly those in vulnerable families, e.g., families with a history of child abuse and/or neglect (Barth, 2009; Whitaker, Lutzker, & Shelley, 2005). The delicate and complex nature of parenting practices that lead to child abuse require a unique approach. This holds true particularly for intervention approaches with fathers who are often marginalized in the child welfare system (Brodie et al., 2014; Gordon et al., 2012). Interventions do not address the unique needs of fathers (Gordon et al., 2012). Fathers who are involved in the child welfare system must navigate complex relationships that may impact their ability to foster positive father-child relationships. Although fathers' active participation in interventions such as parenting classes lessens children's time in the foster care system and increases the likelihood of reuniting with a birth parent (Barth, 2009; Coakley, 2008), data are limited that examine fathers' experiences with parenting or father-focused instruction as public child welfare clients (Franck, 2001; Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008; Stahlschmidt, Threlfall, Seay, Lewis, & Kohl, 2013). Again, this is the nature of this inquiry.

### **Agency Description**

New Day Services for Children and Families (NDS) is the community based 501(c)3 agency that offers the fatherhood intervention in the current study. NDS was established in 1997 and initially provided chaplaincy services in Tarrant County, Texas (Rycraft, Gallagher, & Ashehart, 2010). The mission of NDS is to provide outreach to

families involved in the family and/or juvenile court as a result of familial crisis (Rycraft et al., 2010). Currently, the agency offers a wide array of supportive, intervention, and preventative services for families who reside in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, primarily Collin, Dallas, Denton, and Tarrant counties. Parents and families are referred via the family court, child welfare system, and from other community agencies (Rycraft et al., 2010). NDS is funded by donations, local/state government contracts, and foundation grants (Rycraft et al., 2010). The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the state agency that operates CPS, is one of the agency's main funders (Rycraft et al., 2010). NDS offers a variety of services included but not limited to programs under the category of healthy parenting (Rycraft et al., 2010). Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support (F.O.C.U.S.), the specific community based fatherhood program utilized for the current study, is included as a healthy parenting component.

### **Program Description**

The Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support (F.O.C.U.S.) program began in 2001 (Rycraft et al., 2010). The program services Region 3 (Collin, Dallas, Denton, and Tarrant counties) of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (Rycraft et al., 2010). The F.O.C.U.S. program provides prevention and intervention services. The F.O.C.U.S. program assists court-mandated men who were referred by child welfare social workers and fathers delinquent in child support payments (Rycraft et al., 2010). In the current study, fathers were mandated to complete the program due to an open case in family court regarding issues of child maltreatment.

F.O.C.U.S. is a 10 week program, offered in weekly 2-hour classes, that helps fathers stay focused on their lifelong role and responsibility as a father (Rycraft et al., 2010). Furthermore, the program curriculum includes modules that explore fathers' changing roles within the family and the impact of consistent father involvement on child outcomes. The program curriculum uses a strengths-based approach, facilitation versus teaching, and a masculine model as the guiding framework (Rycraft et al., 2010). The specific goals of the program are to benefit children by (a) increasing their fathers' emotional support, (b) strengthening co-parenting relationships, and (c) promoting fathers' parenting skills (Rycraft et al., 2010).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model served as the theoretical frameworks for this study. Symbolic interactionism and identity theory were appropriate for the study because they focus on the value of self-meaning, identities, roles, role performance, social interactions, and shared norms. Symbolic interactionism offered a broad perspective for exploring and understanding human beings and their interactions with the self in the social environment (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Identity theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The theory has been used to explain levels and types of father involvement. Studies suggested that involvement with children were outgrowths of meaning and the level of importance fathers assigned to their roles (Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993; Marsiglio et al., 2000). This study focused specifically on the macro-level concepts from symbolic

interactionism (interactions and roles) and identity theory (role identities and role salience) to develop an understanding of fathers' lived experiences.

The responsible fathering model is a conceptual framework developed by Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson in 1998. Based on prior research and other theoretical frameworks, Doherty et al. (1998) advanced the notion that fatherhood should be examined through an ecological lens. Moreover, components of the framework allow for the examination of father involvement through multiple contexts (Doherty et al., 1998). Specifically, the Doherty et al. (1998) model underscored individual contributing factors of the father, mother, and child; the quality of the co-parenting relationship; and contextual factors in the social environment (e.g., institutional practices and societal expectations). For the current study, the researcher explored individual father factors, the co-parent relationship, and contextual factors. The researcher employed individual father factors and co-parenting relationship domains to understand fathers' role perceptions and factors which facilitate and/or hinder father involvement. Exploring contextual factors provided background for understanding fathers' experiences in CWS and the F.O.C.U.S. program as well as challenges fathers may face. Of particular interest for this study were the perceptions of fathers in CWS, expectations of fathers in CWS, beliefs and practices in CWS that impact father involvement and fathers' experiences with child abuse prevention/intervention education and fatherhood programs.

### **Philosophical Perspective**

The researcher used a phenomenological perspective to explore fathers' lived experiences. Self-meaning and perceptions were critical areas of exploration. In relation to phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) suggested that meaning comes from examining and re-investigating experiences of research participants. The notion of "meaning" is a central component to symbolic interactionism and identity theory (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). In addition, the father factors domain of the responsible fathering model includes role identification or how fathers understand their roles in the family, which relates to self-meaning. Thus, the theoretical frameworks and philosophical perspective correspond well for exploring this issue. Furthermore, this perspective allowed the researcher to examine common experiences and differences as well as identifying themes across the varied experiences presented by the participants.

The research questions for this study were informed by (a) scholarship on father role perceptions and father involvement; (b) three theoretical frameworks: symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model; and (c) the F.O.C.U.S. program curriculum and program goals.

The current study explored six research questions:

1. What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family with their children?
2. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate father involvement?
3. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder father involvement?

4. What are fathers' perceptions about the impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?
5. In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
6. What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?

### **Researcher's Assumptions**

The researcher approached this study with the following assumptions:

1. Fathers will answer questions openly and honestly.
2. Fathers play critical roles in the overall outcomes for their children.
3. Fathers were impacted by the F.O.C.U.S. program and can explain this impact.
4. Fathers were minimally involved with their children prior to program intervention.
5. Fathers did not maintain primary custody of their children after completing the F.O.C.U.S. program.
6. Fathers would be involved with their children after completing the F.O.C.U.S. program.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used in this study; therefore, an operational definition was provided. The definitions will provide a lens for the reader to understand and apply the terms.

Child Welfare System (CWS): The child welfare system (CWS) refers to the government agency that investigates allegations of child abuse, administers and oversees child abuse intervention and prevention services.

Children's Protective Services (CPS): In the current study, CPS will be used interchangeably with the child welfare system (CWS).

Community Based Fatherhood Program: In this study, community based fatherhood program referred to the F.O.C.U.S. program, which operates under the auspices of New Day Services for Children and Families.

Father: For the current study, only biological fathers were considered. Fathers can reside with their children, maintain a separate resident, or reside with their children intermittently. Additionally, fathers can be present or absent in the lives of their children.

Father-Child Relationship: Father's feelings of connectedness and interactions with their child(ren) (Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2003).

Father Involvement: The model advanced by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985) and Pleck (2010) informed this study. The Lamb et al. (1985) model examined father involvement via interaction, availability, and responsibility. Building on the Lamb et al. (1985) model, Pleck's construct for father involvement included additional factors such as positive engagement, warmth, responsiveness, monitoring, decision making, and indirect care for the child(ren).

Fathers' Perceptions: Perceptions include fathers' attitude, values, emotions, opinions and viewpoints. Identity was also included as males internalized expectations of what it means to be a father (Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2003).

Fathering Behaviors: Fathering behaviors are demonstrated actions of care and support for children over time (McDonald & Almeida, 2004).

F.O.C.U.S.: F.O.C.U.S. (i.e. Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support) is the acronym for the community based fatherhood program intervention in this current study.

Interventions and Intervention Services: Interventions and intervention services are skills-based parenting training and/or supportive parenting groups that help to preserve, maintain, or reunify families involved in the CWS (Barth et al., 2005).

Prevention Services: Prevention services provide parents with skills-training and/or supportive parenting groups with the goal of mitigating risky behavior that may lead to child maltreatment (Barth, 2009).

Roles : Roles are shared norms about social positions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

### **Delimitations**

One delimitation of the study was the reliance on retrospective experiences. While phenomenological methods illuminate lived experiences, it is possible that fathers may have difficulty recalling important aspects of the experiences; thus, making it difficult to completely understand these experiences. Additionally, the trustworthiness of the data was a concern as data collection occurred via self-reports from semi-structured, open-ended interview questions.



Another delimitation was the reliance on fathers to describe changes in fathering behaviors. Research regarding fathers often includes perspectives from mothers and children; however, this study was delimited to fathers' descriptions of their fathering experiences. Starks and Trinidad (2007) described the value of understanding a phenomenon through the lens of those who experience it firsthand. Thus, the researcher relied solely on the fathers' narratives.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of fathers who were mandated to complete a community based fatherhood course due to allegations of child maltreatment. Specifically, the researcher explored fathers' post-intervention perceptions about their roles as fathers, factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement, and the impact of a fatherhood program on their father-child relationship, father role perceptions, and fathering behaviors.

Symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model provided the theoretical context for exploring these issues by examining the broader theme of self-meaning, identities, roles, role performance, social interactions, shared norms, father involvement, and fathering experiences post-intervention. Phenomenology was the philosophical perspective which allowed the researcher to further explore self-meaning using the fathers' experiences as they describe them to better understand this issue. Very little is known about fathers' post-intervention experiences. Moreover, literature that details fathers' experiences with public child welfare interventions as told

by the fathers is underrepresented. Thus, this study adds to the qualitative literature regarding this unique population of fathers.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

The general purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of fathers formerly involved in the public child welfare system (CWS) who also completed a community based fatherhood program. Using six research questions, the study explored the following: (a) fathers' role perceptions, (b) fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement, and (c) fathers' perceptions about the impact of the fatherhood program on the father-child relationship, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors.

This literature review is divided into five sections. The first section explores the theoretical frameworks used to inform this study; that is, symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model. The second section focuses on father roles, including a discussion of socio-historical and sociocultural changes, role perceptions, and role identity. Thirdly, the researcher addresses father involvement as defined in the literature. Additionally, section three explores factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement. Section four explores the interaction between the child welfare system and fathers. This is included to provide context for fathers' lived experiences as former clients in this system. Furthermore, fathers' previous involvement with the child

welfare system was an important connection each participant had in common, which led to their participation in the fatherhood program. Lastly, section five explores father-centered parenting programs (e.g., child abuse prevention and intervention parenting programs and responsible fatherhood programs). The researcher should note that this literature review emphasizes empirical studies that evaluated general program outcomes.

The following research questions informed the review of literature:

1. What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family with their children?
2. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate father involvement?
3. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder father involvement?
4. What are fathers' perceptions about the impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?
5. In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
6. What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model served as the guiding theories for this study. Symbolic interactionism and identity theory provided the context to explore father roles, and role perceptions, as well as interpersonal

interactions. The responsible fathering model offered a mechanism to explore father roles, father involvement, fathers' relationship with the child welfare system and intervention programs, and other contextual factors.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism (SI) provided a lens for exploring father roles, role perceptions, and social interactions. Blumer (1969) notes three theory premises: (a) human beings act towards things based on the meaning they've associated with it, (b) meaning develops as a result of interpersonal social interactions, and (c) meaning is transient—it can change as a result of one's further understanding of the interactions. Meaning is a central element in symbolic interactionism because individuals understand events via the meaning they attach to them (Burbank & Martins, 2009). In other words, meaning is realized as a *result* of social interactions.

**Interactions and roles.** Previous research concurs that the actions of others serves as a point of reference for ascribing meaning to one's self (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) and social interactions (Blumer, 1969). For example, research examining father role construction in an early childhood program suggested that social interactions influenced how fathers viewed their roles and these interactions impacted role behaviors (Anderson, Aller, Piercy, & Roggman, 2015). Essentially, the fathers derive meaning from individual perceptions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) while simultaneously creating identities that align with said perceptions (Burke & Reitzes (1981). This finding also suggests that the actions of others may influence fathers to assign meaning to their

interaction with others (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Father roles and expectations for fathering behaviors as well as expectations for levels of involvement were communicated within the broader culture.

Roles are social positions influenced by shared norms (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993); that prompt or predict behavior (Stryker, 1980). Consequently, individuals may shape their behaviors using these shared norms or expectations as a reference point (Stryker, 1980). Expectations are also synonymous with roles (Stryker, 1980), which are static—replaced by new norms based on current expectations (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). In short, perceptions of fatherhood vary (Lamb, 2000; LaRossa, 1998; Marsiglio et al., 2000); thus, the definition of fatherhood roles and practices is perpetually evolving.

### **Identity Theory**

Identity theory, rooted in symbolic interactionism, is a doorway to understanding father role perceptions and behaviors via role identity and role salience. Comparisons of various interpretations of identity theory reveal common ideas that include: (a) the self as multiple identities, (b) identities organized in a hierarchical manner with the higher identity exerting the most influence on role behavior, and (c) identity development as a result of interactions with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Stryker, 1968, 1980). Stryker (1968, 1980) established the early groundwork for identity theory, which sought to explain behavior variability, specifically regarding identity positions and the hierarchy of salience. Researchers agree that the self is a direct reflection of society, as one's sense of self derives from and corresponds with societal occurrences and interactions (Habib,

2012; Stryker, 1980). Thus, the father role is directly influenced by one's spouse (Pasley, Futris, & Skinner, 2002) and children (Habib, 2012).

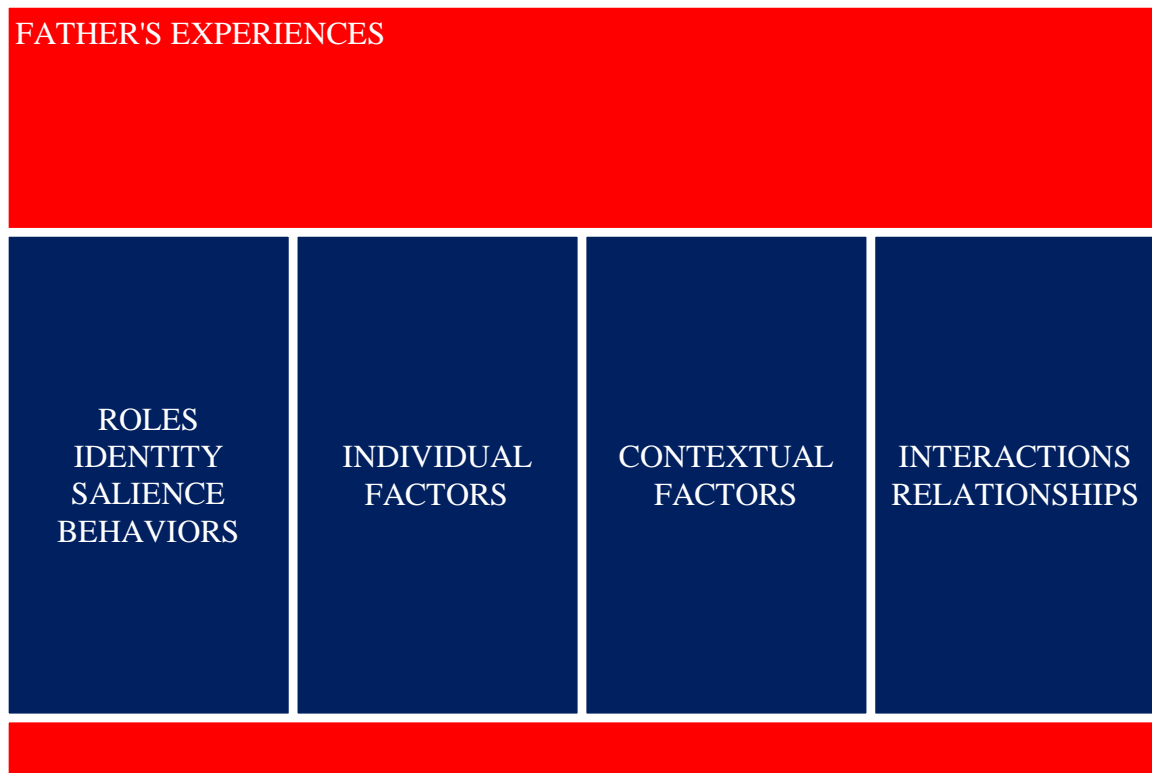
**Role identity and role salience.** Stryker (1987) describes identity as “internalized sets of role expectations” (p. 90) that is reflected in role behaviors (Stryker & Burke, 2000). As such, paternal identity consists of all the behavior expectations one has internalized about fathering (Henley & Pasley, 2005; Maurer et al., 2003). Hence, a father who internalizes the expectation of being a breadwinner for the family will make economic provisions to fulfill the role identity.

Salience is the likelihood of an identity being used under certain conditions (Stryker, 1968). Identities are organized by the level of importance or salience one assigns to it; the innermost identity is the most salient (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Salience and identities are mechanisms used to develop self-concept and direct actions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Bruce and Fox (1997) contended that one's commitment to fathering was an outgrowth of one's sense of self coupled with salient fatherhood characteristics. The level of commitment to a certain identity also depends on the level of salience of the role within the role salience hierarchy (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). The more prominent the role, the more likely one will identify with the assigned role (Pasley, Petren, & Fish, 2014).

### **The Responsible Fathering Model**

As a response to the growing interest in fathering research, the responsible fathering model, in part, uses an ecological framework to systematically explore father

involvement (Doherty et al., 1998). Unlike other frameworks, this model is appropriate for examining fathering in married and non-marital relationships regardless of fathers' residential status (Doherty et al., 1998). This is of particular interest for the current study, as the child custody and living arrangements were potentially varied. This model examines fathering with an emphasis on the father-mother-child triad. The model indicates that one's behavior impacts others within the triad. This dynamic aligns with aspects of symbolic interactionism, specifically with the concept of interactions. Furthermore, the model includes individual factors (father, mother, and child), co-parenting relationships, and contextual factors (Doherty et al., 1998).



*Figure 1.* Theoretical Frameworks



Figure 1 illustrates the connection between key concepts/domains from the study's three theoretical frameworks. This construct was informed by the study purpose as well as research questions and provided a systematic lens to explore factors that impact fathers' experiences. Fathers' experiences are at the core of the construct surrounded by four domains adapted from the theoretical frameworks. These domains serve as factors that may provide insight into fathers' experiences, and informed the review of literature. The review begins by exploring the evolving role of fathers including current role characterizations/perceptions in the literature. Role identity, historical roles, and fathering behaviors are also included. Father involvement is a critical component in this study; thus, the review provides expanded data about constructs, as well as factors, that facilitate and/or hinder levels of involvement. As Figure 1 shows, father involvement is understood via interactions, relationships, individual factors, and contextual factors. The child welfare system, specifically agency practices, is another key contextual factor. Analyzing existing interventions for fathers provides another layer for understanding their experiences.

### **The Evolving Role of Father**

Defining fatherhood, father roles, and role expectations is an ongoing process. Researchers advanced various models and conceptualizations (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Lamb, 2000; LaRossa, 1998; Marsigilo et al., 2000; Olmstead, Futris, & Pasley, 2009; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). A relatively common thread was the notion that fatherhood, father roles, and expectations are social constructions

influenced by cultural shifts (Cabrera, et al., 2000; Lamb, 2000; LaRossa, 1998; Marsigilo et al., 2000; Olmstead et al., 2009; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). The researchers primarily described father roles as multidimensional (Cabrera et al., 2000; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999; Lamb, 2000; Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride, & Ho, 2004). Symbolic interactionism theory suggests that societal shifts impact interactions and one's sense of self. In fact, one premise of the theory proposes that individuals are influenced by social-cultural contexts (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Similarly, in their responsible fathering model, Doherty et al. (1998) indicate that cultural or societal expectations impact father involvement. Moreover, fathering is impacted by economic forces and changes in the public marketplace with the contextual factors of its construct (Doherty et al., 1998). Hence, examining the sociohistorical and sociocultural context may deepen the understanding of fathers' roles in the family.

Lamb (2000) reviewed existing literature on father roles, and developed four typologies to characterize the evolution of the father role. Lamb (2000) suggested that father roles were conceptualized in the literature as: (a) moral teacher or guide, (b) breadwinner, (c) sex-role model, and (d) the new nurturant father. The earliest typology of the father role was based on Puritan values of the father as the moral guide or teacher (Lamb, 2000). Using the Bible and Biblical teachings as guideposts, fathers were responsible for the moral development of their children (Lamb, 2000). As industry changed and became more centralized in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, fathers redefined their roles as breadwinner—providing for their family's basic needs. The 1930s and 1940s

marked the emergence of fathers as the gender-role models, particularly for their sons. Finally, the mid-1970s marked the introduction of the new nurturant father. This father type was described as a “good father” given that he actively involved himself with daily child care. Lamb (2000) suggested that while different roles emerged at various times, the advent of one role did not necessarily indicate the decline of previous characterizations. Lamb’s descriptions support the notion that roles adapt, as suggested by symbolic interactionism. Moreover, Lamb’s descriptions illustrate that one’s social context influences role expectations. This also aligns with symbolic interactionism and the responsible fathering model.

While Lamb (2000) offered non-empirical evidence about fathering roles, other researchers empirically built upon his evidence. Summers, Boller, Schiffman, and Raikes (2006) used qualitative data from 575 fathers or father figures to explore the meaning of fatherhood. Themes related to father role perceptions included: (a) sources of stability or support, (b) mentors or teachers, (c) caregivers, and (d) nurturers. Stability and support described the father as one who provides financial support, emotional support, protection, and a strong co-parenting relationship. Teaching included modeling moral behavior and demonstrating to children how to accomplish tasks like counting or learning to tie shoes. Spending time engaged in recreational activities or temporal routines were examples fathers provided as caregiving activities. Providing emotional support in the form of affection, encouragement, and quality communication were examples of the nurturing aspects of the father role.

Olmstead et al. (2009) explored men's perceptions of the father role, and how these perceptions impact their sense of self as fathers. Using qualitative methods, they conducted focus groups with 34 participants. Participants were married, divorced, or non-resident fathers. Fathering role identities emerged that mirrored existing conceptualization in the literature: provider, teacher, protector, disciplinarian, caretaker, co-parent, and supporter. Murray and Hwang (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with eight married African American fathers. Fathers identified as: providers, role models, disciplinarians, supporters, spiritual guides, and teachers. Another study with African American non-resident fathers found similar characterizations of father roles (e.g., sharing and caring; support; and guidance), but also added elements of racial socialization (Julion, Gross, Barclay-McLaughlin, & Fogg, 2007). For example, fathers described their involvement in cultural celebrations, helping children feel proud of their African American heritage, and navigating the outside world (Julion et al., 2007).

The experiences of low-income fathers were also highlighted. Forste, Barkowski, and Jackson (2009) utilized semi-structured interviews to highlight new cultural constructs of fatherhood that underscored the need to explore how males perceived, constructed, and defined themselves as fathers. The stated goal was to explore how one's relationship with his father impacts his parenting. Participants reported varying levels of contact with their children, ranging from co-residing to very minimal contact. Findings indicated that the quality of males' relationships with their own fathers had a strong influence on their self-perception as a father (Forste et al., 2009). Males with positive and

direct role modeling from their fathers aspired to bring those same practices to their parenting styles (Forste et al., 2009). On the other hand, males without the direct experiences from their biological fathers worked to avoid becoming disgraceful fathers and towards overcoming the negative role modeling of their childhood (Forste et al., 2009).

Studies that examined role perceptions of fathers currently or formerly involved in the child welfare system were limited. In fact, only one study (Coakley, 2013b) examined this issue. Unlike the men in this dissertation study, Coakley's (2013b) samples only included men who still had active cases with the child welfare system, and did not consider post-intervention role perceptions. Coakley (2013b) examined father role perceptions and factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement for fathers involved in the child welfare system. Using a qualitative design, the researcher conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with fathers with active child welfare cases. Four themes emerged, which mirrors the aforementioned studies on father roles: (a) financial provider, (b) nurturer, (c) teacher, and (d) disciplinarian.

## **Father Involvement**

### **Conceptualizing Father Involvement**

Constructs for paternal involvement began to flourish in the 1990s with a strong focus on father presence as an indicator of involvement (Pleck, 2010). Research offered multiple conceptualizations of father involvement; a number of similarities were noted across various models (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). Many of the models represented the

multidimensional nature of father involvement; yet, this multidimensionality made it challenging to conceptualize father involvement (Bruce & Fox, 1999).

Prior to the publication of Lamb et al. (1985), father involvement was viewed as a unidimensional concept (Cabrera et al., 2000; Palkovitz, 1997). Lamb et al.'s (1985) seminal work provided a theoretical framework to examine the multiple dimensions of fathering. The model included: (a) interaction, which was the extent of actual contact through caretaking and shared activities; (b) availability, which was related to fathers' probability for interaction with their child(ren) as a result of accessibility to the child; and (c) responsibility, which was the role fathers undertake to ensure that their child(ren) had the necessary resources (Lamb et al., 1985). Lamb (1986, 2000) further described interaction as measurable levels of involvement or activities such as playing or fathers' talking one on one with the child. Captured as availability in the first model, Lamb (1986, 2000) used the term accessibility to describe not only physical but also psychological presence in the child's life. Lastly, responsibility included provision of material resources and underscored involvement as awareness of child's overall physical, social, and emotional well-being. While Lamb et al.'s (1985) work did not capture all aspects of father involvement (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999), it is lauded as a critical foundation used by other researchers who further developed this area of family research.

Other models offered expanded views of father involvement. For example, Palkovitz (1997) suggested that fathering connected many domains (e.g., cognitive, affective, and behavioral) of functioning. Moreover, he posited that involvement occurs

on a continuum, from low to moderate to high levels of involvement, which is impacted by moderating factors (e.g. role meaning). Generative fathering, another conceptual framework advanced in the literature (Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1996), was defined as “fathering that meets the needs of children by working to create and maintain a developing ethical relationship with them” (p. 18). Ethical approaches to fathering would create more suitable ways of caring, relating, guiding, and empowering children (Dollahite et al., 1996). Pleck (2010) revised the Lamb et al. (1985) model with a primary focus on interaction and engagement. Pleck’s construct consisted of five components: (a) positive engagement activities that promote development; (b) warmth and responsiveness; (c) control, chiefly monitoring and decision making; (d) indirect care, activities done without interacting with the child but for the child’s benefit (e.g., purchasing material goods); and (f) process responsibility.

### **Factors that Facilitate and/or Hinder Father Involvement**

The research revealed a number of factors that may facilitate and/or hinder father involvement. The quality of the co-parenting relationship, maternal gatekeeping, and fathers’ individual factors were noted issues that impact father involvement for CPS involved and non-CPS involved fathers (Brodie et al., 2014; Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Matthews, & Carrano, 2007; Brown et al., 2009; Bryan, 2013; Coakley, 2013b; Coakley, Shears, & Randolph, 2014; Doherty et al., 1998; Julion et al., 2007; Roberts, Coakley, Washington, & Kelley, 2014). Additionally, literature highlighted child welfare related factors (contextual factors) that influence father involvement (Brodie et al., 2014;

Coakley, 2013a; Roberts et al., 2014), which is explored in the “Fathers in Child Welfare” section of this review.

**Quality of the co-parenting relationship.** Feinberg (2003) described the co-parenting relationship as the coordination of parenting responsibilities between adults. This relationship can tremendously impact parents’ relationship with their children (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011) and the father’s level of involvement (Brodie et al., 2014; Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Doherty et al., 1998; Feinberg, 2003; Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2007; Jia & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011; Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). Research examined co-parenting relationships in various family structures (i.e., married, unmarried, unmarried and cohabiting), by residential status, as well as the influence of romantic histories on co-parenting relationship. Five studies (Carlson et al., 2008; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; McLanahan & Beck, 2010; Ryan, Kalil, & Zoil-Guest, 2008; Waller, 2012) used data from the longitudinal Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing (FFCWS) study. Five thousand families were interviewed at the birth of their child and again at ages 1, 3, and 5 (Ryan et al., 2008). Fragile families were defined as unmarried parents and their children, thus, residential status as well as the status of the romantic relationship were contributing variables across these studies (Ryan et al., 2008). Although fathers were included in data collection, measures of father involvement were often gleaned from mothers’ reports (Carlson et al., 2008; McLanahan & Beck 2010; Ryan et al., 2008), which may provide a limited understanding of the fathers’ experiences.



**Relationship histories and co-parenting.** Using the FFCWS data, three studies examined the impact of the quality of the romantic relationship and relationship histories on the co-parenting relationship. McLanahan and Beck (2010) found that the quality of the romantic relationship predicted nonresident father involvement and the quality of non-resident co-parenting. Moreover, findings revealed that nonresident fathers maintained high levels of contact with their children even after the dissolution of romantic relationships. Nonresident fathers also supported their children financially through formal arrangements such as child support and/or in-kind support (e.g., purchasing toys). The researchers also noted that unmarried parents were able to sustain positive co-parenting relationships after the dissolution of the intimate relationship. Similar to McLanahan and Beck (2010), Ryan et al. (2008) reported that parents' romantic relationships may have more impact on patterns of father involvement compared to the quality of the co-parenting relationship. Waller (2012) examined co-parenting styles (cooperative, disengaged, and conflicted). The researcher found that relationship histories were predictors of co-parenting styles. Regression models further revealed that fathers from families with disengaged or conflicted co-parenting styles spent less time with their children compared to parents with cooperative co-parenting styles (Waller, 2012). Likewise, fathers in disengaged or conflicted co-parenting relationships were less likely to participate in temporal activities with their children compared to fathers in cooperative relationships.

**Father's residential status, family structure, and co-parenting.** Two other studies examined the association between the quality of the co-parenting relationship, fathers' residential status, and family structure. Carlson et al. (2008) explored the frequency of non-residential father involvement and its effect on the co-parenting relationship. The researchers found that non-resident fathers saw their children less overtime. For fathers recently in contact with their children, the co-parenting relationship was more positive. Moreover, researchers indicated that cooperation between the parents encouraged fathers to remain involved. When mothers deemed fathers trustworthy and communicated openly about the child, fathers were more likely to spend time with the child and participate in activities more frequently (Carlson et al., 2008). Thus, the researchers concluded that positive co-parenting was a strong predictor of future father involvement. Father involvement, however, was not a predictor of the future quality of the co-parenting relationship.

Fagan and Palkovitz (2011) examined a variety of family structures (married; cohabiting; nonresidential but romantically involved; and non-residential and non-romantically involved) to explore the effect of the co-parenting relationship on father engagement. The study findings were mixed. Co-parenting support was significantly associated with father engagement in non-residential, non-romantic parents (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). Further results revealed a positive and significant association between co-parenting support and father engagement with non-residential non-romantic parents versus non-residential romantic parents. Findings from married, cohabiting, and non-

residential romantic couples indicated higher levels of co-parenting support compared to non-residential nonromantic fathers. Path analysis revealed that in non-residential non-romantic relationships, co-parenting support at year one was significantly associated with father engagement at year three; this was not as evident for residential couples and non-residential romantic couples. Despite this, co-parenting quality at year three was not significantly associated with father engagement at year five. The researchers noted these findings may indicate that co-parenting and relationship variables have greater outcomes in earlier childhood.

**Co-parenting and father involvement.** Additional studies explored the co-parenting relationship and father involvement using different sets of data and other variables. A longitudinal study by Jia and Schoppe-Sullivan (2011) tested the reciprocal relationship between observed co-parenting and father involvement with resident fathers and pre-school aged children. Findings revealed correlations between the measures for father involvement and co-parenting behaviors. Findings also revealed a relationship between father involvement in play and caretaking activities and co-parenting behaviors. Conversely, father involvement was found predict both undermining and supportive co-parenting behavior. Using qualitative methods to study married and unmarried couples, Hohmann-Marriott (2011) examined the association between co-parenting (support, responsibility, and conflict) and father involvement (engagement, accessibility, and responsibility). The researcher found significantly supportive aspects of the co-parenting relationship. Couples reportedly communicated almost daily about their child, which was

strongly associated with the engagement measure of father involvement. Additionally, fathers reported that they were engaged in decision making about their children. Fathers who engaged in decision making reported higher levels of involvement across the three measures (engagement, responsibility, and accessibility). The researcher reported that unmarried, cohabiting unions demonstrated the highest levels of father involvement compared to married couples.

**Maternal gatekeeping.** Maternal gatekeeping, coined by Allen and Hawkins (1999), is described as behaviors that hamper collaboration between parents with regard to their child's care. Fagan and Barnett (2003) were the first to test a model of gatekeeping using observable data along with reports from 102 mothers. Their study explored the relationship between maternal attitudes, the salience of the father role, and the level of father involvement. Researchers hypothesized maternal attitudes were linked to father involvement, and mediated by maternal gatekeeping practices; thus, maternal attitudes impacted said father involvement (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Analysis revealed an association between maternal perceptions of father competence, gatekeeping behavior, and father involvement with children. Correlations were found for gatekeeping and the level of father involvement, paternal competence and gatekeeping, attitudes about the father role and father involvement, and non-residential paternal competence.

Across gatekeeping studies, a common theme was the level of credence mothers placed on the roles of fathers and their expectations of fathers (Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2008; McBride et al., 2005; Schoppe-

Sullivan, Cannon, Brown, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). Moreover, maternal attitudes and perceptions had a strong influence on the quality and frequency of father-child interactions. In their study of 30 children from intact families, McBride et al. (2005) hypothesized that the link between fathers' role investment in parenting would depend on the mothers' attitude toward the fathering role. Regression analysis revealed that fathers who were more involved with their children had wives who perceived them as more invested in the parenting role. This finding contradicted the findings in the Fagan and Barnett (2003) study. Ironically, McBride et al. (2005) found that these fathers did not view themselves as highly invested in the fathering role. Further findings found no significance between fathers' commitment to parenting and his actual level of interaction and accessibility to the child. Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008) found that when fathers perceived greater maternal encouragement, they were more likely to competently involve themselves with the care of their infants. Also, a high-quality co-parenting relationship correlated with lower rates of maternal gatekeeping behaviors. High-quality co-parenting was positively associated with greater relative father involvement. Analysis suggested that maternal encouragement may mediate the association between co-parenting relationship quality and reported father involvement.

### **Fathers' Individual Factors**

There are a number of individual factors that may influence father involvement. Doherty et al. (1998) referred to these as father factors in the responsible fathering model.

Father factors include role identification, parenting skills, personal challenges, residential status, and economics among others.

**Role identification.** Fathers' perceptions about their roles in the family can facilitate and/or hinder their involvement. Roberts et al. (2014) interviewed 30 resident and non-resident fathers about factors that facilitated or inhibited father involvement. Fathers reported a strong desire to serve as breadwinners and role models. Additionally, they identified the importance of providing emotional support and spiritual guidance for their children. These findings are supported in other studies about father role identification (Lamb, 2000; McAdoo, 1993; Murray & Hwang, 2015), and how self-perceptions influence individual behavior (Henley & Pasley, 2005). One limitation of this study, however, was the lack of observed fathering behaviors. Thus, it is unclear if perception led to action in the role.

Bryan (2013) suggested the provider role can have a negative impact on father involvement. The researcher interviewed 47 low-income fathers to explore how they conceptualized and navigated their sense of self as providers. Bryan found that fathers either redefined or disengaged from the provider role. Redefining the role included adding social and emotional aspects of fathering. For example, fathers expressed the desire for emotional closeness with their children. Moreover, participants acknowledged the role both parents play in caretaking and securing resources for the family. Fathers also described the expectation created by the provider role as a barrier. For instance, participants noted that if they were unable to meet financial expectations, familial

relationships became contentious. Moreover, fathers felt judged by the broader society if they were unable to provide. Bryan suggested that provider expectations may marginalize fathers, thus, creating an environment where they disengage from their children.

**Parenting skills.** Perceptions about fathers' parenting abilities can serve as a barrier to father involvement. Literature that addressed this issue primarily focused on the physical and emotional safety of the child. Pederson (2012) examined how mothers and fathers defined good parenting within the context of cultural expectations and values. Mothers disclosed that they served as intermediaries when fathers disciplined their children too harshly or used tones that made mothers feel uncomfortable. Sano, Richards, and Zvonkovic (2008) surveyed rural mothers who attempted to facilitate father-child interactions. Mothers reported levels of mistrust of non-resident fathers. Although the majority of the mothers reported that they tried to facilitate positive father-child interactions, they did not trust fathers' parenting ability. Concern for their child's physical safety was the by-product of this mistrust; reports of fathers' inability to nurture; and the practice of some fathers leaving the child with other relatives during scheduled visitation times played a role as well. Approximately 20% of the 83 study participants described deliberately limiting or denying father-child interactions due to safety concerns. On the other hand, Gordon et al. (2012) suggested when fathers are provided with effective parenting interventions, the occurrence of future maltreatment may decrease. Moreover, offering parenting support to fathers may impact father involvement and overall child well-being (Gordon et al., 2012).

**Personal challenges.** Paternal substance abuse was an identified barrier to positive fathering behaviors. Substance abuse is a common problem among parents in the child welfare system (Coakley et al., 2014) and has been linked to poor parenting and less time spent with children (Waller & Swisher, 2006), and lower levels of father involvement (Stykes, 2015). Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being study, Waller and Swisher (2006) found that fathers who used substances reported engaging in fewer activities with their children. Additionally, mothers engaged in protective gatekeeping practices in these families to keep the child safe; thus, further limiting father involvement. Rockhill, Green, and Newton-Curtis (2008) studied 22 child welfare involved parents who identified as substance users. The researchers found that fathers took longer than mothers to enter treatment (99 days vs. 71 days) even when mandated by courts to comply. Moreover, Rockhill et al. (2008) suggested that males were less like to acknowledge their addiction and expressed trepidation about the child welfare agency's intention to restore child custody following the completion of treatment.

There is a void in the research on mental illness, father involvement and child-welfare (Coakley et al., 2014). However, research explored co-occurring disorders and negative fathering behaviors (Stover, Urdhal, & Easton, 2012), as well as correlates between depression and father involvement (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2005; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). Additional research indicated that greater psychological distress (Cummings, Keller, & Davies, 2005; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, & Cook, 2003) and



antisocial behaviors (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2003) impacted fathers' caretaking behaviors.

**Residential status.** Several studies highlight the relationship between fathers' residential status and involvement with their children (Brown et al., 2009; Bruce & Fox, 1997; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Nelson, 2004). Positive and negative associations were made between fathers' residence, father involvement and children's development. Studies revealed that fathers who co-reside with their children were more likely to be involved (Cabrera et al., 2004; Nelson, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

Castillo, Welch, and Sarver (2011) examined fathers' age, race, ethnicity, educational level, and financial status as factors that affect father involvement. The researchers analyzed data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study beginning from child birth through age 2. Unlike other studies which used this data, Castillo et al. (2011) relied on information gleaned from fathers. Regression models explored relationships between residential status, the sociodemographic variables, and father involvement. All the tested relationships were statistically significant. Moreover, fathers' residential status had a strong negative relationship with father involvement; thus, resident fathers were more involved with their children than non-resident fathers. The relationship remained significant even when controlling for the sociodemographic variables like age and race.

**Economics.** As stated, viewing fathers as providers is notable in historical discourse on child welfare (Brodie et al., 2014; English, Brummel, & Martens, 2009;

Strega et al., 2008). Limited attention is given to the paternal impact on the socioemotional development of the children. Fathers who were unable to provide financially may have opted out of their children's lives. Grief et al. (2011) suggested that men were socialized to believe if they cannot contribute to their children financially, their presence in their children's lives is unnecessary. In their study with child welfare involved fathers, Coakley et al. (2014) found that fathers believed positive fathering aligned with providing financial support for children. The researchers suggested that low-income fathers involved in the child welfare system may feel even more pressure to provide for their children financially. The stress that results from fathers' inability to provide for their children may explain why some fathers are not involved with their children (Coakley et al., 2014).

Economic expectations of fathers who were not involved in the child welfare system were similar. The fathers' ability to provide financial support impacted their involvement. Nepomnyaschy (2007) studied low-income fathers and found that they were more likely to see their children if formal financial support (i.e. child support) was provided. Stykes (2015) found that higher levels of economic capital as well as relationship capital corresponded with increased levels of father involvement in fragile, low-income families. Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010) suggested that fathers' employment increased father involvement.

### **Fathers and the Public Child Welfare System**

The Doherty et al. (1998) model identifies institutional practices (contextual factors) as a factor that impacts father involvement. Societal institutions can serve as direct and indirect barriers to father involvement (Marczak, Becher, Hardman, Galos, & Ruhland, 2015). For this study, the researcher defined institutional practices as attitudes, beliefs, agency policies, and/or procedures that may influence father involvement. When a child's safety is jeopardized and the child welfare system intervenes, this entity becomes a part of the family ecology. Thus, it is crucial to understand the impact of caseworkers' attitudes and beliefs, as well as agency mandates on father involvement. These practices and mandates may serve as factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement. Data were limited, however, that examined fathers' experiences after child welfare cases were closed.

### **Father Involvement, Attitudes, and Beliefs about Fathers in the CWS**

Meta-analyses of studies from the 1990s to early 2000s on caseworkers' behaviors and attitudes indicated negative attitudes towards fathers and their lack of engagement in service provision (Saleh, 2013; Zandoni et al., 2013). These attitudes persist in current research. Fathers' experiences within the child welfare system were poorly documented because fathers were often overlooked (Brown et al., 2009; Cameron et al., 2014; Lee, Bellamy, & Gutterman, 2009; Malm & Zielewski, 2009; Zandoni et al., 2013). Researchers suggested that the practice of ignoring or excluding fathers was entrenched in child welfare practice (Brown et al., 2009; Dominelli et al., 2011; Strega et al., 2008). Additionally, researchers suggested that fathers and paternal figures were

negatively stereotyped and assumed to be absent, irresponsible, and uninvolved (Dubowitz, 2009; Ewart-Boyle, Manktelow, & McColgan, 2015; Storhaug & Oien, 2012). For example, fathers were seldom considered for placement even if their children were removed the mother's custody (Brown et al., 2009; Ewart-Boyle et al., 2015). These stereotypes may inadvertently drive practice that excludes fathers instead of promoting their involvement (Brodie et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2009). As a result of agency practices, data indicated fathers were not fully engaged in services. Findings from a qualitative study with 34 caseworkers indicated workers' comfort levels were higher with mothers than fathers (O'Donnell et al., 2005). Themes from the O'Donnell et al. (2005) study included: "Fathers are Peripheral to the Child Welfare System" (p. 395), "The System Treats Fathers more Severely than Mothers" (p. 398), "Fathers Mistrust and Avoid the Child Welfare System" (p. 399), "Mothers Obstruct Fathers' Involvement in Child Welfare Interventions" (p.401), "Many Fathers Have Little to No Commitment to Their Children" (p. 402), and "Caseworkers Treat Mothers and Fathers the Same" (p. 403).

Although much of the research was disparaging in terms of agency response to fathers, a strand of literature raised additional issues that may impact father involvement. Studies indicated case workers' fears of fathers and lack of training with father engagement as possible barriers to father involvement. Caseworkers in the Huebner et al. (2008) study acknowledged the need for specific training on how to engage and work with fathers. Specifically, the caseworkers indicated a need to learn how to write better

case plans involving fathers (Huebner et al., 2008). Similarly, English et al. (2009) found caseworkers amenable to training on father involvement. The caseworkers agreed that standards for mothers and fathers should be the same with efforts made to engage both parents in services. Caseworkers in the O'Donnell et al. (2005) study reported some trepidation about confronting or engaging with fathers because of possible violent or hostile reactions. In spite of that, one study suggested that the potential risks posed by fathers were not "properly assessed or managed" (Maxwell et al., 2012, p. 161), which is connected to lack of training.

Caseworkers were also represented as more neutral or positive in their attitudes towards fathers and father involvement. English et al. (2009) used a pre- and post-test design from a training project for caseworkers in the northwestern United States, and found father friendly policies and practices can have an impact on father involvement (English et al., 2009). Specifically, this study examined organizational support for father friendly practice and policy, the effectiveness of father involvement training on social workers' perspectives, and training effectiveness on practices to identify and locate fathers (English et al., 2009). Data sources included reports from agency administrators, program directors, site coordinators, and social workers. Survey data were collected at two points in time while the family had an active case with the child welfare agency. Additionally, case files provided data about case planning activities for the family. Pre-test findings revealed social workers strongly agreed that father involvement was important and standards should be similar for both parents. Yet, social workers were

neutral regarding agency practices that promoted or focused on father involvement.

From pre to post test, social workers agreed on the principle or idea of father involvement but were neutral regarding the practice of these ideals in their case work (English et al., 2009). This study, however, did not infer correlation between worker attitudes and their work practices.

Saleh (2013) conducted a qualitative study exploring social workers' experiences working with fathers as well as their perspectives about fathers. Six themes emerged from four focus groups with 22 county social workers: "The Continuum of Father Responsibility" (p. 126), "Child Welfare Professionals' Use of Skills and Relationship Building" (p. 127), "The System is Treating Fathers Better, But More Change is Needed" (p. 128), "Gender Communication and Stereotypes" (p. 129), "Gatekeepers" (p. 130), and "Regional Issues are a Factor that Affect Fathers" (p. 131). Social workers discussed the barriers and successes to working with fathers describing them as men who "stepped up" or "already responsible" compared to fathers who were uninvolved due to issues like substance abuse. Social workers noted the need to manage their own personal biases when working fathers.

### **Father Involvement, Agency Mandates, and Practices in CWS**

Malm et al. (2006) surveyed caseworkers (n=1,222) to explore the extent of CWS agency attempts to identify and locate nonresident fathers. Findings indicated that caseworkers (88%) knew the identity of fathers of children; yet, caseworkers made contact with only 55% of these fathers (Malm et al., 2006). Another study of 1,203

caseworkers in Kentucky reported only 37% agreed or strongly agreed that they worked with fathers on their caseloads (Huebner et al., 2008). In a study of 1,958 children in foster care from four US states examining father support and reunification goals, Malm and Zielewski (2009) found that reunifying with fathers was the goal in 4% of cases versus 36% when compared to mothers. Remarkably, abuse allegations were substantiated against the mothers in 54% of cases compared to 19% of fathers (Malm & Zielewski, 2009).

In her study with caseworkers, Saleh (2013) noted a number of agency mandates that created barriers to optimal father involvement. For example, caseworkers indicated that child welfare cases are still named after mothers. Additionally, caseworkers noted services like drug treatment and housing services catered to mothers and their children; no similar services existed for fathers and their children. On the other hand, Saleh (2013) reported that caseworkers described current practice and policies as favorable for fathers in terms of guidelines, state as well as internal policies. For example, children are not automatically placed or returned to mothers as historically practiced (Saleh, 2013).

Similar practices occurred internationally. Reviewing 40 child protection files from the U.K., Baynes and Holland (2012) reported that 60.3% of fathers were involved in initial case planning meetings. Strega et al. (2008) reviewed 116 Canadian child welfare case files, which included court documents, risk assessments, social worker logs, and referral letters. The researchers found that child welfare social workers described 50% of fathers as irrelevant to mothers and children (Strega et al., 2008). Additionally,

20% were described as a risk to mothers and children while 20% were viewed as an asset to mothers and children (Strega et al., 2008). Moreover, fathers who were viewed as a risk were contacted by social workers 40% of the time, while fathers viewed as an asset were contact 75% of the time (Strega et al., 2008).

### **Fathers as Mandated Clients**

The fathers in the current study were a unique population, court mandated clients. These fathers' experiences with and attitudes about service utilization were expected to differ from parents who seek services voluntarily. One article was found that explored fathers who were designated as court-mandatory participants in child abuse prevention/treatment services. Greif et al. (2007) conducted focus groups with 18 fathers and used clinical observations to better understand this population in a family therapy setting. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences in the child welfare system and to offer input to improve programs serving fathers. Fathers reported that they were reluctant to engage in services because they denied the charge of having abused or neglected their child. Fathers also blamed the system and society for treating them differently or holding them to a higher standard than mothers. Additionally, fathers felt their parenting abilities were treated as an afterthought, as they were primarily viewed as providers. Fathers expressed that mothers did not view them as equal parents but providers or occasional childcare providers. Formerly absent fathers reported that their attempts to reconnect with their children were thwarted by mothers who refused to



relinquish control. In these instances, fathers expressed a need for mothers to assist in their reintegration into the family.

Participants' experiences in their family of origin influenced the type of parenting styles they used. Some men were raised with a father in the home and others were not. Additionally, some men reported use of harsh discipline methods in their families of origin. Fathers acknowledged that these experiences impacted their parenting. Fathers lacked information about typical child development which also impacted their current functioning as parents.

Gallagher, Rycraft, and Jordan (2014) conducted an evaluation of F.O.C.U.S., the same program featured in the current study. As stated in Chapter I, the F.O.C.U.S. program serves both child welfare clients as well as child support clients. Gallagher et al. (2014) evaluated the child support side of the F.O.C.U.S. program. Single group pre- and post-tests, telephone interviews with stakeholders and program instructors, as well as focus groups with program participants served as data sources. Information learned from the program included roles and responsibilities of being a father, the importance of prioritizing needs of children first, camaraderie and identification with fathers with similar experiences, and the importance of self-control and positive attitude about the co-parenting as well as father-child relationship.

### **Father Specific Parenting Interventions**

A review of the literature failed to yield scholarship that explored father's perceptions post-intervention about their roles in the family. Although evaluation data

explored the father-child relationship and fathering behaviors, these findings were limited. Much of the literature regarding fathering behavior reported changes in attitude versus changes in behavior. In fact, behavior changes were absent from the scope of the studies reviewed. Although the current study is not a program evaluation, research questions four through six have program evaluation undertones. These questions sought to understand program impact on attitudes and behaviors.

### **Parenting Programs for Fathers**

Parenting programs are designed to increase parental self-efficacy, improve parent-child relationships (Fletcher, Freeman, & Matthey, 2011), ensure the acquisition of parenting skills (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008), and improve the quality of father involvement (Panter-Brick, Burgess, Eggerman, McAllister, Pruett, & Leckman, 2014). In a meta-analysis of 128 parent training evaluation studies, Kaminski et al. (2008) found program content included: child development; importance of positive parent-child interaction; responsiveness, sensitivity, and nurturing; emotional and disciplinary communication; behavior management; and promoting pro-social behaviors and academic skills. Although the parenting literature was robust, parenting program effectiveness focused primarily on mothers (Lundahl et al., 2008; Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014).

Wilson et al. (2014) used pre- and post-test outcomes to measure improvements related to child outcomes as a result of Australian fathers' participation in a father-only emotion coaching program. Forty-three resident fathers with preschool aged children

participated in this program. Five quantitative measures were used to measure parental emotional style, children's negative emotions, parental sense of competence, hostile parenting, and children's strengths and difficulties. Findings revealed significant changes in fathers' parenting style related to their children's negative emotions. Additionally, following the intervention fathers were more likely to encourage their children's emotional expressions, and less likely to downplay these emotions. Fathers reported a reduction in harsh parenting. Lastly, fathers reported feelings of higher self-efficacy and overall satisfaction with their parenting.

Dolan (2014) used qualitative methods to research fathers who self-referred to a fathers' only program in the United Kingdom. Eleven semi-structured interviews were used to explore fathers' motivation and challenges to participating in the parenting course; men's perceptions and practices about fathering; and the program impact on perceptions and practices. Findings indicated an increase in fathers' understanding of their children's emotional needs. Moreover, fathers reported a more emotional connection with their children. It is noteworthy that men reported an increase of emotional connection regardless of residential status. Similar to the fathers in the Wilson et al. study, fathers also reported an increase in parenting self-efficacy as evidenced by an increase in emotional control and changes in physical discipline practices. This study also examined fathers' expressions of masculinity. Findings indicated that fathers embraced more traditionally feminine parenting qualities like tenderness and empathy. Yet, fathers still held onto traditional male roles of provider, moral teacher, and disciplinarian.

Gearing, Colvin, Popova, and Regehr (2008) used pre and post testing as well as a three month post-intervention follow-up to explore father-child relationships, efficacy in father/parent role, and overall family functioning. Fathers volunteered to participate in an eight-week program and completed three quantitative measures: The Family Assessment Measure, the Multidimensional Self-Esteem Inventory, and the Parenting Stress Index. Twenty-nine fathers completed the pre- and post-test measures; only 17 completed the three month follow-up. Findings indicated improvements in task and role performance, better communication, increased involvement, and decreased control in the family at the end of the intervention. While these outcomes were positive, fathers were not able to sustain these changes at the three-month follow-up.

### **Child Abuse Prevention/Intervention Programs**

Court-mandated parenting education/training is a key intervention used to address issues of child maltreatment for families involved with child welfare services (Barth et al., 2005). Typically, the objectives of these programs include but are not limited to: (a) improvement of parenting skills and ability, (b) improvement of child outcomes, and (c) reduction of the risk of future child maltreatment (Johnson, Stone, Lou, Ling, Claassen, & Austin, 2008). Parenting classes for child welfare families have the goal of teaching child management (e.g., providing clear directives) and encouraging nurturing as well as parental responsiveness (Casanueva, Martin, Runyan, Barth, & Bradley, 2008). Moreover, parents learn to reduce negative child behaviors, improve parent-child communication, and foster a tender parent-child relationship (Casanueva et al., 2008).

Much of the literature on child abuse prevention/intervention programs was program evaluations.

Four articles were located that evaluated child abuse prevention/intervention program evaluations that targeted outcomes for fathers. Studies were excluded that did not clearly segregate parental data (Gershater-Molko, Lutzer, & Wesch, 2003). It was unclear from the data presented, however, if program participation was mandatory. Data from annual visits with mothers, program records, and surveys from home visitors were utilized to evaluate a home visitors program based in Hawaii (Duggan et al., 2004). The purpose of this three-year study of families with infants was to describe fathers' program participation and the impact of the program on fathers' involvement with their children. The 643 families that participated were described as at-risk for abuse, but no incidents of child maltreatment had occurred. Mothers' reports were the data source for this study. Findings indicated that fathers did not participate in the program at the same rate as mothers even when both were present in the home. Fathers' role in parenting was significantly impacted by the quality of the co-parenting relationship. Issues of child accessibility also impacted fathers' parenting role. The researchers indicated that many of the fathers worked outside of the home when program staff would visit; thus, levels of participation were impacted. Additionally, due to work schedules, fathers' level of child care involvement was less when compared to the mothers. In terms of program impact of fathering behaviors, there was no impact on fathers' accessibility, engagement, or sharing of child care responsibilities (Duggan et al., 2004).

The remaining articles evaluated group intervention with fathers. Scott and Crooks (2007) evaluated the Caring Dads program, a program designed specifically for maltreating fathers. The goals of this 17-week long program were to help men end violent parenting practices, encourage healthy attitudes about the father-child relationship, and understand the impact of child maltreatment and domestic violence. The researchers utilized a five-level comprehensive evaluation approach which examined: (a) is the program meeting a need in the community, (b) use of theory in the program, (c) program implementation, (d) outcomes, and (e) program efficacy. Data sources included but were not limited to: semi-structured interviews with 45 men in the program, referral patterns, attrition rates, and participant behavior change from pre and post intervention. This study was of particular interest for the data regarding fathers' gains' pre to post intervention. To explore this issue, the researchers utilized the Parenting Stress Inventory-Short Form, a quantitative tool, with 23 program participants. Paired t-test revealed a significant decrease in fathers' level of aggression, belittling, and rejection of their children. Levels of anger decreased over time in family situations. Moreover, findings revealed an overall reduction in parenting stress, increase in fathers' level of emotional availability, decrease in hostility toward child, and decrease in anger arousal toward the child and in family situations. Although these findings indicated a level of program effectiveness as it related to behavior and attitude changes, the small sample size created issues related to statistical power of the findings.

Examining other aspects present in the Caring Dads Program data, Scott and Lishak (2012) explored “mens’ generalized anger; over-reactive and hostile parenting; and disrespectful and uncooperative co-parenting” (p.681). Ninety-eight fathers completed three pre- and post-test quantitative measures. Results revealed that the most significant change occurred in the area of parenting and co-parenting. In relation to parenting, evidence revealed changes in over-reactivity, hostility, and laxness (Scott & Lishak, 2012). Significant findings were noted about fathers’ attitudes in the co-parenting relationship. Findings showed a rise in level of fathers’ respect for mothers’ commitment to parenting and parental judgment.

Similar to the program in the aforementioned studies, the goals of the DADS Family Project were to help each father recognize his impact on his children; improve communication skills, stress management skills and discipline practices; and encourage fathers to understand that parenting is a partnership (Cornille, Barlow, & Cleveland, 2005). The DADS Family Project offered face-to-face classes and distance learning. This study included participants from both class settings to evaluate effectiveness. A mixed methods approach was utilized for this study. The Parental Attitude Research Instrument and a semi-structured interview were used for pre- and post-tests with program participants. Significant quantitative findings revealed that fathers showed attitudinal improvements in the subscale areas of permitting self-expression, avoiding harsh punishment, and no physical punishment (Cornille et al., 2005). It was noteworthy that these significant findings were attributed to the distance learning subset of fathers.

Fathers in the face-to-face class had significant attitudinal changes on the avoiding harsh punishment subscale.

### **Responsible Fatherhood Programs**

In 2002, President George Bush introduced an initiative geared to promote responsible fatherhood (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). The Fatherhood Initiative was formed to establish community programs geared towards confronting the economic and parental aspects of fatherhood. Although the delivery mechanisms and messaging had divergent points, the key goal for Responsible Fatherhood Programs was to strengthen the father-child relationship and enhance outcomes for children and families with a special emphasis on the marriage as a conduit toward fostering stronger family connections (Weaver, 2012). In 2005, the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) provided federal funding to support programming promoting father involvement (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). From 2006-2010, the DRA annually appropriated \$150 million dollars in discretionary grants to implement the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. Reauthorization occurred in 2010 via the Claims Resolution Act with additional extensions occurring in 2013 (Cowan et al., 2009). The act was reauthorized in 2010 via the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 (Weaver, 2012). Federal dollars are still used to support these programs.

The DRA outlined allowable activities for Responsible Fatherhood Program in four specific areas. First, activities should promote marriage or sustain marriage through activities such as counseling, mentoring, dissemination of information about the benefits



of marriage and co-parenting, relationship skills training, skills-based marriage education, and financial planning. Secondly, activities must promote responsible parenting through activities such as skill-based parenting education, and the promotion of payment of child support. Third, activities should promote economic stability by helping fathers improve their economic positions. Lastly, activities should promote responsible fatherhood through dissemination of information, promotion of programs, and program development (Soloman-Fears, 2014; Weaver, 2012).

Although the F.O.C.U.S. program is not a responsible fatherhood program, the curriculum and service delivery approaches are informed by these emerging programs. As a result, literature related to responsible fatherhood programs was included in this review. Moreover, this literature was the most robust in terms of highlighting men's programmatic experiences and impact of the interventions on their parenting and relationships. For example, Anderson et al. (2005) interviewed 20 fathers about their responsible fathering program experiences. Fathers reported a number of benefits including emotional support from other fathers, assistance with issues such as substance abuse, positive father-child and co-parenting relationships, and skills to navigate large bureaucracies like child support. Robbers (2005) worked with recently incarcerated fathers in the Fairfax County Fatherhood Program for Incarcerated Dads. Using an experimental design along with focus groups, Robbers (2005) revealed significant findings regarding father-child contact and fathers' knowledge of psychological and

physiological development of children. There were no significant findings concerning the co-parenting relationship.

In their review of fatherhood program evaluations, Bronte-Tinkew, Burkhauser, and Metz (2012) suggested that fatherhood interventions should target the following outcomes: work, self-sufficiency, employment, responsible fatherhood, healthy co-parenting, psychological well-being, recidivism, and risky behaviors. As evidenced by the F.O.C.U.S. program values (see Chapter I), responsible fatherhood and healthy co-parenting are critical components. Responsible fatherhood interventions improve fathering behaviors such as the quality of the father-child relationship and level of father-child contact (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012). Responsible fatherhood programs focused on healthy co-parenting, stress, strengthening the quality of the co-parenting relationship, which included reducing conflict and the incident of intimate partner violence (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012). Literature that included components for child abuse or intervention, related to responsible fatherhood programs, was not found. Responsible fatherhood programs, however, addressed variables related to factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement, which is a critical aspect of this study.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of seminal and current research exploring: (a) socio-historical changes in father roles, role perception, and role identity; (b) the various ways in which society conceptualizes father involvement; (c) factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement; (d) the interaction between fathers and the child welfare system; and (e) parenting interventions for fathers, including child abuse

intervention/prevention programs and responsible fatherhood programs. Symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model guided the exploration of these issues. The literature suggested that the role of fathers in families is ever changing (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; LaRossa, 1988; Marsiglio et al., 2000; McBride et al., 2005; Olmstead et al., 2009; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Summers et al., 2006) and influenced by a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, the expanding views of father involvement (Dollahite et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 1985; Palkovitz, 1997; Pleck, 2010).

Although no single predictor precisely accounted for the level of father involvement noted in the literature (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001), a variety of frameworks underscored relationship factors, individual factors, family of origin issues, and other contextual issues (Doherty et al., 1998; Parke, 2000). Cooperative and/or contentious co-parenting relationships impacted levels of father involvement (Carlson et al., 2008; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; Jia & Schoope-Sullivan, 2011; McLanahan & Beck, 2010; Ryan et al., 2008; Waller, 2012). Fathers' individual factors such as role identification (Hensley & Pasley, 2005; Roberts et al., 2014), parenting skills (Pederson, 2012; Sano et al., 2008), fathers' psychological well-being (Coakley et al., 2014, Stykes, 2015; Waller & Swisher, 2006), fathers' residential status (Brown et al., 2009, Coley & Hernandez, 2006), and economics (Brodie et al., 2014; English et al., 2009; Nepomnyaschy, 2007) were factors that facilitated and/or hindered father involvement.

This review examined attitudes and practices related to fathers in this system. Direct and indirect barriers to father involvement were noted in the literature (Cameron et al., 2014; Ewart-Boyle et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2009; Malm & Zielewski, 2009; Marczak et al., 2015; Saleh, 2013; Zanoni et al., 2013). Additionally, interventions to ameliorate issues that led to child welfare involvement focused primarily on mothers (Wilson et al., 2014). Research on fathers mandated to participate in child abuse prevention/intervention services, and the outcomes of such interventions is an emerging area. Although the number of fatherhood programs has increased, data examining longitudinal outcomes and fathers' perceptions about the impact of these programs is also an emerging area. Thus, the purpose of this study—to fill the literature gap and understand fathers' perceptions about their post-intervention experiences.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY  
**Research Design**

The current study sought to understand and provide meaning to the experiences of fathers who completed a community based fatherhood program. To understand the fathers' lived experiences the researcher employed phenomenology, a type of qualitative research that addresses the salience of one's direct experience. Creswell (2009) suggested that a phenomenological approach yields the type of research that identifies the core of the human experience. Similarly, Patton (2002) asserts that phenomenology is a method used to identify the essence of participants' lived experiences (Patton, 2002). The meanings connected to these experiences provide greater insight about the study phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenological methods are naturalistic and rooted in experiences and behaviors (Creswell, 2009). Utilizing this approach offered a way to understand the phenomena of fathering, through the lens of fathers who shared their own experiences and identified behaviors and actions they deemed important. As suggested in the literature review, fathers' experiences were limited in the literature as these experiences were often explored through mothers' reports or individuals who work with fathers. The current study adds to the qualitative research discourse by illuminating the experiences of fathers who completed a community based fatherhood program.

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family with their children?
2. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate father involvement?
3. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder father involvement?
4. What are fathers' perceptions about the impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?
5. In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
6. What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?

This chapter describes the study population, sampling procedures, protection of human subjects, procedures for data collection and analysis, and the role of the researcher.

### **Population**

The population for the current study comprised former clients of a community based fatherhood program, Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support, or F.O.C.U.S. (See Appendix G – Demographic Characteristics of Population). One hundred men who completed the program between the years 2013-2015 were included in the recruitment process.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Criterion sampling was used for this study. Participants who met the predetermined criterion (Patton, 2002) were chosen for the study. The study criteria were (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) biological fathers, (c) referred to the F.O.C.U.S. program via mandatory family court order due to allegations or a substantiated case of child abuse resulting in an open case with Children's Protective Services, (d) completed the 10 weeks of F.O.C.U.S. program classes, and (e) cases with Children's Protective Services were closed.

The researcher used a key informant or gatekeeper, the Executive Director at New Day Services, to initiate the recruitment process. The Executive Director a cofounder of the F.O.C.U.S. program, has served as a New Day Services employee for 14 years and facilitated the program for nine years (Rycraft et al., 2010.). He has presented locally and nationally on the F.O.C.U.S. program and father engagement (Rycraft et al., 2010).

Upon receiving consent from the Texas Woman's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research and consent from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Region C to utilize their clients, the researcher collaborated with the Executive Director at New Day Services to secure participants. The Executive Director emailed all eligible men and included an attached letter, prepared by the researcher, that explained the purpose of the study (See Appendix A- Electronic Recruitment Message). Along with the study purpose, the attached email included the researcher's contact information (email address and cellular phone number), along with the Consent to

Participate in Research form (see Appendix B). The researcher did not initiate any contact with the sample population. Individuals interested in participating in the study made the initial contact with the researcher.

When contacted, the researcher used the informed consent document to explain the purpose of the study, study procedures, study incentive (\$20 Walmart gift card), potential risks, and steps to minimize risks. Participants were informed that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and had no bearing on current or future relationships with the F.O.C.U.S. program. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Consent forms were signed prior to the start of the data collection process. Eighteen fathers responded to recruitment efforts. Three fathers were excluded because they did not meet the study eligibility criteria. Five fathers did not respond to follow up telephone calls from the researcher and were excluded after multiple attempts to establish contact. Therefore, the sample for this study included ten fathers.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The researcher submitted a Protection of Human Subjects application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas Woman's University in Denton, TX. The researcher obtained a letter of support from New Day Services for Children and Families per IRB requirements. Issues related to risks, and a plan to address those risks, were noted in the application. The researcher received IRB approval prior to beginning the recruitment process.



The researcher developed an informed consent document that detailed the purpose of the study, the risks involved, and a declaration indicating that fathers could end their participation at any time (Appendix B – Consent to Participate in Research). Additionally, all risks were outlined and steps to minimize the risks were provided on the informed consent. The researcher, in collaboration with New Day Services, also submitted documentation required by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) that addresses risks and confidentiality.

Patton (2002) suggested that ethical practices include: (a) explaining the study purpose, (b) gaining informed consent, (c) providing an overview of confidentiality, and (d) explaining data access prior to participation in the semi-structured interview. The study purpose was explained using simple, clear language with the participants. Furthermore, the researcher shared question themes with the participants and asked if there were any concerns. The researcher discussed informed consent, notified participants of their right to discontinue participation in the study at any time, and shared that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary. The researcher informed the participants that (a) their names would not be used but would be changed in any written documents, (b) all notes and writings would be maintained and stored by the researcher in a locked office or via password protected software, (c) copies of the final project would be made available upon request, and (d) data, specifically notebooks and journals, were subject to review by the researcher's classroom instructor. This information was delivered orally and in writing.

Confidentiality was protected to the extent allowed by law. The researcher stored written materials in a locked file cabinet in her home office. Computer data files, including transcriptions and interview recordings, was stored on the researcher's password protected desktop computer at her home office. Participant numbers replaced real names on all computer data files and transcripts. Participants' identifiable information were stored in a separate cabinet drawer of that locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office.

Patton (2002) suggested that due to the nature of qualitative research, in-depth interviewing may cause an expected or unexpected level of participant reactivity. For example, exploring parenting practices and family relationships in this study may create a level of stress for the participants. To protect participants from fatigue and/or emotional distress during the interview process, the researcher informed participants that they could take breaks and resume when comfortable. All participants had the option of stopping the interview or refusing to answer questions; the researcher informed them of this. In addition, the researcher provided a list of community resources (see Appendix C) to minimize risk related to emotional distress. To ensure that participants were comfortable and did not feel coerced to participate in the study, the researcher verbally and in writing during each research stage, reminded each participant that participation was voluntary. Participants were also informed that they had the right to end their participation without penalty.

## **Data Gathered**

The researcher used three methods to collect data from the participants: a) demographic questionnaire, b) semi-structured interview, and c) field notes. Demographic information allowed the researcher to understand basic information about the fathers in the study. The demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D) included questions about age, racial/ethnic background, marital status, number of children, co-residence with children, employment status, income, and year completed the F.O.C.U.S. program. The researcher used a standardized open-ended interview and an informal conversational interview approach as outlined by Patton (2002). The researcher used the same basic questions with each participant. The questions followed a prescriptive sequence (See Appendix E – Interview Guide).

Patton (2002) described the standardized open-ended interview as advantageous because it reduces researcher bias and allows for comparison of responses. An informal conversational approach allowed questions to emerge from the immediate context (Patton, 2002) and created an individualized interview experience. Participants were asked experience and behavior questions; opinions and values questions; and feelings questions (Patton, 2002). Field notes were recorded during and directly following the interviews. Patton (2002) states that field notes are descriptive and should include basic information and observations. Additionally, the researcher used field notes to capture direct quotations, to record her reactions to the information shared during the data collection process, and to capture initial interpretations and data analysis (Patton, 2002).

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

After filing the dissertation prospectus, receiving approval from the Texas Woman's University Graduate School, and approval from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Region 3, the researcher began the recruitment process. Individuals were recruited in collaboration with staff from the F.O.C.U.S. program at New Day Services. The researcher provided the New Day Services Executive Director with an electronic recruitment letter (See Appendix A – Electronic Recruitment Letter) and the informed consent document (See Appendix B – Consent to Participate in Research). The recruitment letter and informed consent were emailed to 100 fathers who completed the F.O.C.U.S. program. Interested individuals contacted the researcher electronically or via telephone. The researcher verbally confirmed that the interested father met the eligibility for the study during initial telephone conversation and again prior to the start of data collection. During the telephone conversation, the researcher explained the purpose of the research, research procedures, and potential risks associated with participation. Additionally, the researcher discussed the interview questions, the member checking process, and the study incentive (\$20 Walmart gift card). The researcher allowed fathers to ask questions about the study. Participants were also asked their preferred method of communication: telephone, text messaging, and/or email. Finally, the researcher scheduled the face-to-face interview.

The researcher held the interviews at a F.O.C.U.S. program class location or a local library in a private room. She conducted all interviews, which were audio recorded to ensure accuracy and for later verbatim transcription and data analysis. The researcher used a miniature digital tape-recorder with a built-in microphone and/or a password protected application for audio recording via the researcher's mobile telephone. Using a recording device helped to ensure that the language of the participant was accurately captured.

The data collection process began with a review of the informed consent document, both the researcher and the participant received a signed copy. The researcher explained each section in detail and answered all questions. The researcher explained the risks involved with participating in the study and provided each participant with a list of community resources (See Appendix C – Community Resources) should the research process illicit any adverse responses. The fathers signed the consent prior to the start of data collection. The father's copy of the consent form and the resource list were placed in a sealed envelope. Then the researcher provided the fathers with the study incentive. Next, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D – Demographic Questionnaire).

Each participant was assigned a unique number (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) that was recorded on the demographic questionnaire to maintain anonymity. The interview began after the questionnaire was completed. Prior to starting the interview, the researcher obtained verbal consent from each participant to audio record the interview as

well as the field notes. All participants provided verbal consent. A digital voice recorder and back-up recorder via the researcher's cell phone were used. Field notes were maintained in a small spiral notebook.

Following a brief introduction, 12 questions were posed as outlined in the interview guide (See Appendix E – Interview Guide). The researcher also asked probing questions, which allowed fathers to add additional comments about their experiences. The data collection process lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher asked each father to participate in the member checking process. Fathers who were interested completed the member checking section on the informed consent document (See Appendix B – Consent to Participate in Research). Seven of the participants consented to participate in the member checking process. The researcher explained that a summary of research results would be made available upon request at the conclusion of the dissertation process. The researcher encouraged the participants to email, text, or telephone if they wished to add any additional comments or information about their fathering experiences and the F.O.C.U.S. program. No responses were received.

The researcher recorded field notes at the end of each interview after concluding all business with each participant. Audio recordings were uploaded to the Sound Organizer software located on the researcher's password protected computer. The researcher transcribed all recordings verbatim. The unique participant number assigned during the data collection process was used in the transcripts to ensure participant

anonymity. Follow-up communication occurred via email or telephone when the researcher needed further clarification about information from the interview. The researcher contacted two fathers for further clarification. At the conclusion of the data analysis process, the researcher contacted the participants for the member checking process. Participants were emailed member checking instructions (See Appendix F – Member Checking Instructions) along with their own verbatim transcript and a list of initial themes for their comments.

### **Procedures for Data Analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process. At the conclusion of each interview, audio recordings were downloaded to a password protected laptop computer to the Sound Organizer software. This software provided the platform for data transcription. This platform was chosen because it allowed the researcher to easily control the recordings with a key stroke. For example, the researcher was able to slow down the recording speed in order to increase the accuracy of the transcription process. The researcher transcribed all of the interviews. Each transcript was placed in a table to assist the coding and organization process. All transcripts and supporting documents were encrypted to maintain participants' confidentiality.

Phenomenology was the philosophical approach that informed the current study. Moustakas (1994) suggested that qualitative research should focus on the complete research process while exploring the true essence of participants' experiences. Moreover, analysis should be systematic and structured (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Methods to develop codes and broader themes to represent shared meaning or experiences were adapted from works of Saldaña (2013) and Bernard and Ryan (2010). As stated in Chapter I, the phenomenological approach allows researchers to discover meaning through examining and re-examination of participants' experiences. First and second cycle coding as suggested by Saldaña, allowed the researcher to use a comprehensive, exhaustive approach to data reduction and theme development. Bernard and Ryan (2010) suggested that theme development was derived from the data and prior theoretical knowledge. Thus, prior research was a critical component used to understand fathers' experiences.

### **Coding**

The literature indicated a variety of purposes for the coding process. For example, Richards and Morse (2007) suggested that coding allowed researchers to simplify unstructured data. Saldaña (2013) proposed that codes summarized data through words or short phrases. Bernard and Ryan (2010) described the process as one of theme development, which arose from the data and prior theoretical knowledge about the phenomenon in focus. The researcher's operational definition of coding aligned closely with Saldaña (2013) as well as Bernard and Ryan (2010). Information gleaned from interviews and field notes informed the coding process. Words and short phrases summarized fathers' experiences and prior knowledge gained from the literature informed the data reduction process.



Creswell (2009) suggested clustering similar topics or ideas. These clusters provided the basis for initial categories then initial codes (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, the literature described coding as a cyclical action that may require multiple attempts (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). The researcher read each transcript line by line prior to beginning the coding process. Each transcript was coded manually using first and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, the researcher also reviewed field notes and reflexive journal entries that corresponded with each interview to cross reference information. The researcher's field notes and reflexive journal contained initial impressions that were used to inform the first cycle coding process. For example, after each interview, the researcher used free writing to connect interview discourse to information gleaned from previous research. After coding the data, patterns and themes were identified and synthesized. Data reduction occurred by typing manually coded data into a three column tally table created via Microsoft Word. Possible codes and themes were color coordinated. Themes were also assigned numbers denoting the number of times it appeared in the data for the corresponding question to easily identify repetition. This approach helped the researcher synthesize fathers' experiences and describe the meaning of these shared experience as indicated through the study themes.

**First cycle coding.** Creswell (2009) suggested that researchers should read all of the data to gain a general sense of the overall meaning. Moreover, researchers should write notes in the margins to capture general impressions at this time (Creswell, 2009).

Saldaña (2013) described this type of initial data reduction as first cycle coding methods. This study used three types of coding suggested by Saldaña (2013): exploratory (Holistic Coding), elemental (Initial Coding), and affective (Emotion and Values coding). As suggested by Bernard and Ryan (2010), the researcher also used the theoretical frameworks (symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model) and additional information gleaned from the review of literature to further reduce and categorize possible codes and themes.

**Second cycle coding.** Saldaña (2013) suggested that second cycle coding allows researchers to reorganize and reanalyze coded data from first cycle approaches, thus, reducing the multiple ideas developed via first cycle methods into smaller data portions. Focused coding was used to reduce the data during second cycle coding. The researcher reviewed the first cycle codes creating an exhaustive list of preliminary codes with the corresponding interview questions. Next, the researcher reviewed each list for repetition and similar ideas. Similar ideas were color coded and numbered to indicate frequency of occurrence in the data. Using the lens of phenomenology and imaginative variation, the researcher also tried to understand how these ideas provided meaning or explained the shared phenomenon as suggested by Moustakas (1994). Then, the researcher grouped similar ideas together onto a single different table. From these similar ideas and words, codes were developed. For example, codes such as be there for them, supporter, love of family, provider, guide, caretaker, and children first formed the physical and emotional presence theme. This coding process was repeated a number of times to ensure that the

researcher captured the spirit of the fathers' experiences. The researcher reviewed the codes multiple times for consistency, rephrased as necessary, and developed into themes of the current study. The list of codes and themes were shared with two peer debriefers.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness and authenticity are the preferred language used to describe validation strategies used in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). According to Carlson (2010), qualitative researchers use methods like reflexivity, thick and rich descriptions, and triangulation to establish trustworthiness. Incorporating these methods into a qualitative study will "ensure that data were appropriately and ethically collected, analyzed, and reported" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1103). Moreover, member checks and peer debriefing add to the trustworthiness of qualitative research. To ensure trustworthiness, the following strategies were used: 1) reflexivity; 2) thick and rich descriptions; 3) triangulation; 4) peer debriefing; and 5) member checks.

### **Reflexivity**

Given the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative data collection and analysis, personal bias is a serious concern. Patton (2002) argued that the process of reflexivity stresses that the researcher reflect upon his or her cultural/political consciousness and take ownership of said perspective. Furthermore, the process of reflexivity exposes ways in which researcher bias impacts the research process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Carlson (2010) suggested maintaining a journal during the research process to engage reflexivity. So, for this study, the researcher maintained a

reflexive journal from the beginning of the research study until the end of the writing process. The journal contained the researcher's feelings and experiences about the research process. Moreover, journaling helped the researcher avoid any romanticized notions about this research area. Journal notes were stored in Microsoft application, OneNote, Microsoft Word documents, and a spiral notebook. Electronic journal entries were password protected; the password was only accessible to the researcher. The spiral notebook was stored in the researcher's home office.

### **Thick and Rich Descriptions**

Thick and rich descriptions of the contextual settings helped address issues of credibility. Carlson (2010) argued that promoting an "in-depth understanding of commonalities" (p. 1104) was one of the primary functions of thick and rich descriptions. These descriptions provide details about the participants, data collection, and analysis. This study used direct, verbatim quotations from participants as a way to provide the rich details, which are included in chapter IV.

### **Triangulation**

This process involved collecting information from different sources, at different times, in different settings, and utilizing different methods to analyze the data (Carlson, 2010; Patton, 2002). The practice of triangulation allowed researchers to substantiate various sets of data with each other (Carlson, 2010). Study data were collected in a variety of ways in an attempt to meet the methodological triangulation standards (demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and field notes). The researcher

triangulated data by examining findings from the lens of symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model. Additionally, use of member checks and peer debriefing to ensure accuracy with data analysis and theme development further enhanced the trustworthiness of the research findings.

### **Peer Debriefing**

Trustworthiness is established when research findings accurately represent the perspectives of study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing is one strategy used in data analysis that can help maintain the authenticity of participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of peer debriefing involves exchange of ideas with colleagues outside of the research project (Creswell, 2009). Two doctoral candidates at Texas Woman's University who'd also completed advanced qualitative methods coursework served as the peer reviewers. The researcher used them throughout the data collection and data analysis process as sounding boards about approaches to the research and the research process. The researcher twice met with the peer reviewers in person. At the initial meeting, the researcher provided copies of each transcript, which included interview questions. Additionally, the researcher provided the peer reviewers with codes and initial themes developed by the researcher. Finally, the researcher shared the process used to develop the codes and themes, information about theoretical frameworks, and chart templates used by the researcher for coding. The researcher did not require the peer reviewers to use chart templates but simply offered it as a mechanism to remain organized.

The second meeting occurred approximately two weeks later. This meeting lasted approximately three hours. The researcher and peer reviewers discussed each interview questions and compared codes. The researcher explained again how and why the data were reduced to certain codes then broader themes. The peer reviewers critically reviewed the process and provided feedback about the codes and themes provided by the researcher. This feedback included wordsmith work for consistency and clarity as well as the addition of three codes. Although the peer reviewers did not have to arrive at the same coding or theme structures as the researcher (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013), consensus should exist with data labels and the process used to develop these classifications (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Codes and themes were finalized at the conclusion of the meeting. Additionally, the researcher emailed a list of the revised codes and themes to establish consensus.

### **Member Checking**

According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), member checking is the process that involves validating the researcher's data interpretation by eliciting feedback from the participants. The member checking process occurred at the conclusion of data analysis. Participants were informed about the member checking process prior to the start of data collection. Prior to the start of the interviews, the researcher explained the member checking process to each participant. Following the explanation, the researcher asked each participant if he had any questions and whether he was interested in participating. Fathers who responded affirmatively signed the member checking section of the study

consent form (See Appendix B – Consent to Participate in Research). Men who indicated an interest were provided with an electronic copy of their transcripts for further feedback and a summary of study themes (See Appendix F – Member Checking Instructions). Furthermore, participants were invited to add clarifying thoughts or ideas if they deemed necessary. All of the participants indicated an interest in participating in this process. The researcher asked the fathers to respond electronically or via telephone with any changes or clarification within 10 days of receipt of transcripts and themes. After 10 days, the researcher sent electronic reminders. Six of the ten participants responded and affirmed the information presented in the transcripts.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As a researcher, I had notions about who I thought would participate in this study; my experiences and data support that African American families are disproportionately involved in the public welfare system. However, my sample was majority white. Also, mothers tend to reunify with their children in higher numbers (Coakley, 2013a). In my study, 70% of the fathers served as the primary caretaker for their children. This demographic information alone was contrary to my experiences and expectations.

As a former social worker for five years with Children's Protective Services and a university educator for eight years, specifically in public child welfare, I reflected upon my challenge as a professional with engaging fathers in supportive services. Moreover, in my own parenting journey with my husband, I gained an even greater appreciation for the potential influence fathers have on their children. Much of my graduate work focused

on father involvement and understanding barriers to father-child relationships. I believe this was partly because of my personal experiences with my father and grandfather, but also because of my own assessment of the quality and level of support I was able to provide to fathers as a social worker.

In my experience, social service programs have a difficult time engaging fathers in their programming. There are a number of reasons for this including inability to locate fathers, father incarceration, worker ineptitude, and fathers' unwillingness to participate. As a social worker, I did not actively engage fathers in services and when I did they were offered the same type of cookie cutter services provided to mothers. Fathering is a different experience than mothering and services for fathers should align with this notion of difference. I am hopeful that this research will serve as the initial foundation for further exploration of evidence-based practice with fathers and the development of models for effective father recruitment, father engagement, and service provision.

### **Summary**

Overall, this chapter detailed data collection and analysis procedures including phenomenological research methods, an overview of participants, protection of human subjects, ethical considerations, role of the researcher, trustworthiness, data collection, and plan of analysis. For this study, phenomenology was an appropriate research design approach because the researcher was ultimately interested in unearthing participants' lived experiences and assigning meaning to those experiences. Finally, the chapter



discussed data analysis and related information including but not limited to types of interview questions, use of audio recordings, data coding, and trustworthiness.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents data findings from 10 fathers who completed a fatherhood program as a result of involvement with the child welfare system. Specifically, this study explored fathers' perceptions about (a) the father's role; (b) factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement; and (c) the impact of the fatherhood program on their father-child relationships, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors. The researcher gathered data via semi-structured individual interviews. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Transcripts were analyzed to uncover subthemes. Data were then sorted, grouped, and compared for similarities and/or repetition. Finally, after taking a holistic view of the data (Saldaña, 2013) the three main themes and nine subthemes were developed. The researcher utilized phenomenology as the philosophical perspective for the study; as such, the themes and subthemes represent the fathers' collective experiences. The study explored the following research questions:

1. What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family with their children?
2. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate father involvement?
3. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder father involvement?

4. What are fathers' perceptions about the impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?
5. In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
6. What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?

This chapter presents a description of the sample, procedures for data collection, procedures for data analysis, research findings, and a summary of the data.

### **Description of Sample**

Fathers in the current study met the following eligibility criteria: (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) biological fathers, (c) referred to the F.O.C.U.S. program via mandatory family court-order due to allegations or a substantiated case of child abuse resulting in an open case with Children's Protective Services, (d) completed the 10-week F.O.C.U.S. program, and (e) all cases with Children's Protective Services were closed. Nineteen fathers expressed an initial interest. The researcher eliminated two fathers as they did not meet the eligibility requirements. Five fathers were non-responsive to multiple contacts by the researcher. Two fathers were unable to interview due to scheduling conflicts. Ten fathers eventually consented and participated in the interview process.

Fathers were recruited via the F.O.C.U.S. program database. Approximately 100 men received an electronic recruitment message from F.O.C.U.S. program staff. The message instructed all interested parties to directly contact the researcher if interested in

participating in the study. Upon receiving a father's verbal consent to participate, the researcher emailed him the consent forms (See Appendix B – Consent to Participate in Research). Hard copies of the consent forms were presented and signed prior to the start of each interview.

At the outset, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix D – Demographic Questionnaire) which queried one's age, racial/ethnic background, marital status, number of children, the participant residential status, employment status, yearly income, and the year he completed the F.O.C.U.S. program. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the sample. The fathers ranged in age from 25 to 54 years of age. Five fathers identified as Caucasian, two fathers identified as black or African American, two as Hispanic or Latino, and one as Native American. Four of the fathers were single; three were married or with a domestic partner; and two were divorced. Seven fathers were employed, two were out of work but looking, and one was unable to work. Two fathers earned between \$10,001 and \$29,999 yearly; six earned between \$30,001 and \$50,000; and two earned between \$50,001 and higher. Residential status and number of children are not captured in Table 1 but described here. Three of the participants had one child, four had two children, and three of the fathers had three, four, and eight children, respectively. Seven of the participants resided with their children, while three maintained separate residence.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Sample Fathers*

| <b>Characteristics</b>     | <b>Category</b>        | <b>N</b> | <b>n</b> | <b>%</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Race</b>                |                        | 10       |          |          |
|                            | Caucasian              |          | 5        | 50%      |
|                            | African American       |          | 2        | 20%      |
|                            | Hispanic               |          | 1        | 10%      |
|                            | Native American        |          | 2        | 20%      |
| <b>Relationship Status</b> |                        | 10       |          |          |
|                            | Married/Separated      |          | 4        | 40%      |
|                            | Single                 |          | 4        | 40%      |
|                            | Divorced               |          | 2        | 20%      |
| <b>Employment Status</b>   |                        | 10       |          |          |
|                            | Employed               |          | 7        | 70%      |
|                            | Unemployed but looking |          | 2        | 20%      |
|                            | Unable to work         |          | 1        | 10%      |
| <b>Income</b>              |                        | 10       |          |          |
|                            | \$10,000-\$29,999      |          | 2        | 20%      |
|                            | \$30,000-\$50,000      |          | 6        | 60%      |
|                            | \$50,001 and higher    |          | 2        | 20%      |
| <b>Age</b>                 |                        | 10       |          |          |
|                            | 25-34                  |          | 4        | 40%      |
|                            | 35-44                  |          | 4        | 40%      |
|                            | 45-54                  |          | 2        | 20%      |

**Data Analysis****Coding**

Data coding and analysis were ongoing processes. To protect the data's integrity, the researcher transcribed the data at the conclusion of each interview. The researcher used first and second cycle coding as outlined by Saldaña (2013). For the first cycle

coding, the researcher used three approaches: Holistic Coding, Initial Coding, and Emotion/Values Coding. Focused Coding was used for the second cycle coding. During each cycle, the study's theoretical frameworks also informed the process, as suggested by Bernard and Ryan (2010). After coding the data, patterns, codes, and themes were identified and synthesized. Connections between the theoretical framework, the research literature, research questions, and interview questions were made and reduced to highlight various themes.

**Holistic Coding.** Saldaña (2013) identified Holistic Coding as an exploratory coding method. This approach allowed for preliminary assignment of codes prior to attaching fixed codes. Moreover, Saldaña (2013) argued that Holistic Coding is a “preparatory approach” (p. 142) slated before more detailed first and/or second cycle coding approaches. The researcher used Holistic Coding to capture initial impressions about the fathers' shared, collective experiences. The researcher read each statement or groups of statements, and assigned a word or phrase to capture the participants' points of view. The researcher attempted to avoid editing her thoughts, but limited impressions to one word or short phrases. See Table 2 for an example of Holistic Coding.

Table 2

*Example of Holistic Coding*

| Interview Questions & Responses   | Holistic Codes   |
|---|--|
| <p>Participant 10</p> <p>Interviewer: What do you think are your role(s) and responsibilities as a father?</p> <p>Mainly it first it was just to be there. Then a lot of fathers you know, some make the decision to become fathers and others don't. So the first part for me was just actually being there. I mean I have always been good with kids. My friends have children and things like that so just being a male role model for her you know for her to see what a man should be towards you know opposite sex. So that was my main thing. Loving them and being there unconditionally.</p> | <p>Be there for children</p> <p>Role model</p> <p>Gender role model</p> <p>Love them unconditionally</p> |

**Initial Coding.** Initial Coding allowed for deeper consideration of the data compared to Holistic Coding. The researchers used a two column sheet; the left side contained the transcript and the right side contained initial codes. The researcher used an in vivo approach (i.e., coding line by line using participants' words), and then reduced words or phrases to summarize the fathers' words. Information gleaned via Holistic Coding helped to inform this reduction process. See Table 3 for an example of Initial Coding.

Table 3

*Example of Initial Coding*

| Interview Question & Response   | Initial Codes   |
|---|---|
| <p>Participant 1</p> <p>Interviewer: What do you think are your role(s) and responsibilities as a father?</p> <p>My roles and responsibilities as a father is to first to nurture and love my children. Second is to be a good example for my children. Show them a good work ethic, responsibilities, values and moral. Um to be a leader, to be a coach, to be a teacher. To be just be support for everything that they are going to go through positive and negative. There's going to be ups and downs, There's just going to be a lot of things, so many important roles going to there for them. I just need to be there for them.</p> | <p>“nurture and love my children”</p> <p>“be a good example”</p> <p>“show them a good work ethic”</p> <p>“responsibilities”</p> <p>“values”, “morals”, “be a leader”</p> <p>“to be a coach”</p> <p>“to be a teacher”</p> <p>“be support for everything they are going to go through positive and negative”</p> <p>“ups and downs”</p> <p>“so many important roles”</p> <p>“be there for them”</p> |

**Emotion and Values coding.** Emotion and Values Coding was the third method used for first cycle coding. Emotion Coding labeled the emotions experienced by the participants as interpreted by the researcher (Saldaña, 2013). The coding also includes non-verbal cues (e.g., laughter, crying) and affect. Values Coding captured participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs. Moreover, values represented participants' worldview (Saldaña, 2013). Value Coding allowed the researcher to understand fathers' role perceptions, as well as perceptions about program impact on their fathering roles and



behaviors. The researcher used the same form for emotion and values coding. This form was also a side by side format with transcripts on one side and codes on the other. The researcher used single letters to represent emotions (E), values (V), and beliefs (B). See Table 4 for Emotion and Values Coding example.

Table 4

*Example of Emotion and Values Coding*

| Interview Question & Response   | Emotion and Values Codes   |
|---|--|
| <p>Participant 2</p> <p>Interviewer: What do you think are your role(s) and responsibilities as a father?</p> <p>I think my roles and responsibilities as a father is always been to teach them how teach them about the world. I used to always do science experiments with my daughters you know looking at bugs, trees, and plants, and stars you know. I would go out of my way and do the research myself if I didn't know so I could teach them. Um how to think critically because they were both daughters and I wanted them to be strong women (tearing). I didn't want to think that they just had to play with dolls. So I taught them (choking up). My daughters had no problem handling spiders (laughs). So (choking up) that's about it.</p> | <p>E: Emotion<br/>V: Values<br/>B: Belief</p> <p>B: teach them about the world<br/>B: teach them to think critically<br/>E: tearing up (observed)<br/>V: gender expectations<br/>E: choking up (observed)<br/>E: laughing (observed)</p> |

**Second cycle coding.** The researcher used a focused coding approach for this cycle. The goal of focused coding is to develop categories or themes by searching for the

more frequent or significant codes (Saldaña, 2013). The codes are then clustered together to create broader, overarching themes or descriptions (Saldaña, 2013).

## **Findings**

This section presents themes gleaned from the data analysis. The findings include the research questions, corresponding interview questions, themes, and the verbatim discourse in support of the themes from 10 transcripts. The study yielded three major themes: 1) Physical and Emotional Presence, 2) Challenges, and 3) Adaptability. Table 5 summarizes the major themes and subthemes.

Table 5

### *Major Themes and Subthemes*

| <b>Main Themes</b>                     | <b>Subthemes</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Physical and Emotional Presence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father roles – provider, role model, nurturer</li> <li>• Love and commitment to child(ren)</li> </ul>                        |
| <b>Challenges</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-parenting struggles</li> <li>• Substance use/abuse</li> <li>• Unexpected triggers</li> <li>• Single fatherhood</li> </ul> |
| <b>Adaptability</b>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting skills</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Role perceptions</li> </ul>   |

## **Presentation of Themes**

### **Theme One: Physical and Emotional Presence**

The theme Physical and Emotional Presence connected to research questions one and two, which explored role perceptions and factors that facilitate father involvement.

The theme not only referred to fathers' physical presence in the family home or the child's life, but also an intentional commitment to their child's emotional and psychological wellbeing. Fathers' role descriptions or perceptions were often connected with physical presence and emotional support. All of the fathers described aspects of physical and emotional presence when answering interview questions related to research questions one and two.

### **Father Roles – Provider, Role Model, Nurturer**

This subtheme corresponded with research question one, which explored fathers' perceptions about their role in the family. Fathers have, in previous studies, characterized themselves as breadwinners or providers (Lamb, 2000), role models (Lamb, 2000; Murray & Hwang, 2015), and nurturers (Dollahite et al., 1996; Julion et al., 2007). Fathers in the current study either used these very labels or described their functions, which aligned with the characterizations offered in previous scholarship.

**Provider.** Although fathers did not define the provider role, many of the experiences shared reflected expectations of providers as characterized in the literature. For example, fathers talked about providing for their children's basic needs (e.g., food and clothing), and acknowledged the provider role as one of the predominant roles learned about or observed during their own upbringing. Fathers also connected the notion of being a provider as a role they wanted to model for their children because they placed value on this role.

When asked what they believed was their role(s) and responsibilities are as fathers, some characterized or described the provider role.

My role as a father was to provide um financially for the family, was to um nurture and love as well. (Participant 1)

Providing for them and most importantly getting involved as much as you can with teenagers. (Participant 3)

Protector, provider, motivator, disciplinarian, leader, guide. (Participant 4)

You know um provider, nurturer, caretaker, those kinds of things. (Participant 6)

Providing for the emotional needs of that child and physical needs obviously. (Participant 7)

... I feel a child need to be supported financially. That's first and foremost. (Participant 9)

Um well I mean just the basic one. Making sure she is fed, clean, got clothes. (Participant 8)

**Role model.** Fathers' descriptions of role model included examples of actively modeling, teaching, assessing themselves to ensure they exhibited high standards, and encouraging their children to aspire toward greatness.

When asked to describe their role in the family fathers responded:

To be a good example for my children. Show them a good work ethic, responsibilities, values, and morals. Um, to be a leader, to be a coach, to be a teacher. (Participant 1)

I set the example...help [child] understand what they are capable of doing and where they need to go...I set the path for my son it's going to give him a clearer picture. (Participant 9)

Being a role model for her you know for her to see what a man should be toward you know opposite sex. (Participant 10)

One father shared that he wanted to model religious faith to his children.

I am a believer so I definitely enculture that faith in them as well and try to lead them in that direction so that they can know and have that relationship as well. (Participant 5)

Another emphasized the importance of being the standard bearer in his family.

...just helping them to prepare for life by providing a guide post of sorts (Participant 7)

**Nurturer.** Some fathers spoke more candidly at the emotional support and guidance they offered their children. Fathers conveyed the importance of the emotional connections they have with their children. Most described strong emotional connections prior to completing the F.O.C.U.S. program which were enhanced through their participation in the program.

My roles and responsibilities as a father is to first nurture and love my children... (Participant 1)

Be emotionally involved with them. Care what they care about. Um you know just involved with just with their life in every aspect you know. (Participant 6)

Providing for the emotional needs of that child and physical needs  
obviously...show them how to love different people in different appropriate ways.  
(Participant 7)

...he knows that I'm his father and the he need to know that I love him very much  
and care for him... But he needs to understand that you know there is a  
connection between you and me [son] and that you know I love him very much.  
(Participant 9)

Mainly its first it was just to be there. Then a lot of fathers you know, some make  
the decision to become fathers and others don't. So the first part for me was just  
actually being there. (Participant 10)

One father talked about nurturing and being connected with his young daughter and also  
provided an example of behavior he deemed as nurturing. As a single father, he described  
himself as fulfilling both father and mother roles.

Um I'm a single dad so I've also got the mommy roles. So I do the nurturing and  
do her hair and learning to paint nails (laughs). So I mean it's all spectrum.  
(Participant 8)

### **Love and Commitment to Child(ren)**

Fathers' love and commitment to their children did factor into their involvement  
with their children as revealed in the data. In fact, fathers' reported the love they felt for  
their children was a source of motivation to remain involved in their lives. Fathers also

highlighted the emotional connections with their children as well as the desire to provide emotional reassurance to their children.

When asked ‘what being an involved father means’, fathers offered clear duties and expectations.

An involved father to me means that um I participate emotionally, physically, and you know financially for the children where they can come and talk to me on any level. (Participant 1)

Involved father to me is getting to know my children...I don’t know um it’s just easy because of how I feel about them. I enjoy them. I look forward to being with them. (Participant 5)

One fathers described fatherhood as a serious responsibility that required commitment. I’m involved in everything.... I am in everything. I take them to church. I’m in their social life. I mean I just want to know. (Participant 4)

I have never really been one for responsibility. But I have to do it now you know, I don’t have a choice. If I want to bring her up the way I want her to be brought up I have to buckle down and do these things. (Participant 8)

Having someone at home asking your name, where are you, needing you it kind of like already predisposes me to play that role. (Participant 9)

Other men emphasized that becoming a father was something they looked forward as they were prepared to parent.

I just couldn't wait to have kids so I could have an excuse. So it made it easy.

They were kind of like my best friends. (Participant 2)

It's easy for me to be involved with my son because I love my son. When you love someone you're always going to make time for them. (Participant 9)

I wanted children from an early age. I got started late. I was almost 30 when I have my first...I've been ready. (Participant 10)

## **Theme Two: Challenges**

The third research question explored fathers' perceptions about factors that hinder father involvement and yielded the theme, challenges. Fathers faced myriad challenges which may have impacted their involvement with their children. The challenges described by the participants were parenting related (co-parenting struggles and single fatherhood) but also personal (substance use/abuse). Another subtheme, unexpected triggers described the residual effects on fathers' as a result of involvement with the child welfare system. All of the participants did not face each challenge represented by the subtheme; yet, all participants had to overcome or were still addressing at least one or more of these challenges.

### **Co-parenting Struggles**

Fathers acknowledged that their co-parenting relationship was strained. Participants shared that strained co-parenting relationships or divergent parenting styles created challenges from them as fathers.



His mother and I don't get along period. She has tried to take him from my custody and now I have to take all of these safety precautions because she is unstable. Don't get me wrong. I know he needs to have a relationship with her but she is not capable or safe with him. So no it's not good. (Participant 7)

The challenges have mostly been dealing with the mother....My actions really demonstrate that I am caring for my son, that I want to be around him, and I want him to develop and grow and um I feel that the most difficult part is dealing the mother because she doesn't understand that her actions her you know behavior directly affects his upbringing. She says so many hateful words...(Participant 9)

### **Substance Use/Abuse**

Fathers reported that substances played a role in the involvement with child welfare and impacted the level as well as the quality of their involvement with their children. For one father, drug use also fueled criminal behavior which led to an extended period of incarceration and separation from his children.

The lack of not being able to be there. You know the fact that I was locked up for 26 months I didn't have any contact with anybody...Drugs got in the way. I was addicted to methamphetamines for 20 year...It made a mess. (Participant 1)

My CPS case was related to drugs. I got clean....there has been a lot of change. (Participant 8)

Fathers shared that drug use led to the loss of child custody. Both parents used drugs in these instances. In these cases fathers acknowledged that CPS restrictions were warranted; however, these restrictions limited father-child interactions.

We had dealt with CPS in the beginning because of the marijuana usage. You know because of her self-medication. (Participant 10)

While lack of stable housing was a perceived barrier, one father also admitted that drug use was the primary issue that led to CPS intervention.

Well you know when she got the CPS case um started you know I didn't have a stable, I didn't have a place to bring my daughter. I mean I couldn't bring her into a one bedroom apartment....And um I mean drug use um that's it. Yeah.

(Participant 6)

### **Unexpected Triggers**

This subtheme was one of the most robust in the current study. Fathers shared their feelings about their involvement with CPS and how these experiences continue to impact their parenting. These feelings were not necessarily positive. The subtheme is called "unexpected triggers" because most of the fathers understood the cause of their emotional responses but did not expect feelings to linger. Again, the majority of the fathers in this study completed the F.O.C.U.S. program well over a year ago. All of the fathers spoke about how CPS involvement and in some cases separation from their children as a result of the involvement impacted father-child connections.

Fathers reflected about the separation that occurred when children were in foster care.

Visitation restrictions limited father's time with their children.

I think I've always been involved with you know my daughter you know. And of course the CPS experience came up with when my son was just a baby. So I of course my time with them I think that was the least amount of time I was involved because of them stepping in and having a time when I didn't see them as much.

That's the only time I can think of not really being involved. (Participant 5)

The lack of restrictions helps. The quality of my time is better now because it's not in um and you know there was someone supervising always so the quality is a lot better. It's a lot more comfortable. (Participant 6)

Only one father in the study did not have contact with his children as they remain in foster care with maternal family members. The father tearfully recounted that all contact with his children has been severed although he was told visitation was guaranteed.

They aren't with me right now. I try to be involved as much as I can through my wife...I want to spend time with them but I still don't. CPS told me that I would be able to after I completed the class but it still didn't happen. (Participant 2)

Three fathers and their children were profoundly impacted by agency involvement. The relationship with the child welfare agency has changed the way in which these fathers parent or interact with their children. One father shared that his parental self-efficacy was impacted as a result of CPS involvement.

I think sometimes when you are with CPS you start to second guess and think everything that you are doing is wrong. You know and it can really mess you up.

(Participant 3)

Another father shared that both he and his son were paranoid about typical experiences that impact children like a fall at the playground.

In my mind they are still out there lurking behind every corner just waiting for an opportunity to, to jump on me. And it makes me a less focused and purposeful parent because of the things they put me through. (Participant 7)

### **Single Fatherhood**

The majority of fathers in the study had joint or sole custody of their children. A few were single fathers and spoke about the unique challenges single fathers face. For example, one father spoke about gender bias and his struggle to find social support from government agencies and in the broader community.

Like I went to the WIC office and they were going to deny me because the woman behind the counter said this is woman's program. I said no this is a children's program (Participant 8)

One father shared feelings of isolation and overwhelm. He felt having another parent in the home would be less stressful and lessen the parenting burden he experiences serving as both mother and father. He also shared that he does not have any sources for social support. He would like to process these feelings yet he does not have the personal resources to secure therapy or other supportive services.

Being a single parent you really don't have too much feedback to go on and you are kind of everything. You know you gotta be the gentle side which was maybe the wife's role or vice versa it doesn't matter. And then you know the stern side or whatever side that you know. (Participant 3)

### **Theme Three: Adaptability**

Fathers overwhelmingly noted changes in their behaviors and practices as a result of completing the F.O.C.U.S. program. While some fathers were more impacted by the program than others, all agreed that the information gleaned from the class was useful. In fact, most shared distinct practices learned in the program that they currently use with their children. The theme Adaptability was underscored during discourse related to research questions four through six. Parenting interventions challenge parents to examine past behaviors and practices with the goal of replacing maladaptive approaches. Similarly, fatherhood programs present fathers with alternatives approaches as well as emphasizing the critical role fathers play in child development.

#### **Parenting Skills**

Fathers described a number of parenting scenarios in which they used strategies learned from the F.O.C.U.S. program. Three fathers shared that these strategies help them to diffuse their anger or suppress conflict which may potentially lessen the likelihood of future child maltreatment.

The main thing is to know when I am getting frustrated or angry is to step back and took a look at my part of it. (Participant 1)

I've noticed through the course what triggers him off...So seeing that stuff work is an eye opener whether I was taught through F.O.C.U.S. or not. (Participant 3)

First thing is time. Distance. Go to your room. Talk about this in a minute. But honestly I think, I think it really does, it did play a big role in learning immediately. The fact that I said time is something that they taught me.

(Participant 7)

One father discussed strategies he learned to help him deal with typical developmental challenges like misbehavior or tantrums.

Choosing my battles is probably one of my biggest challenges because I want her to do things a certain way but I have to get used to the fact that she not always going to do it... (Participant 8)

Another father emphasized how the F.O.C.U.S. program gave him the tools to create plans and schedules for his young son. The father shared that these tools increased his self confidence as a father.

Now before when he was born, I really didn't want to have a child. I wasn't ready obviously...And so F.O.C.U.S. fatherhood helped me create a plan and maintain a schedule so that I don't make excuses for myself as to why this happened and why I couldn't have this accomplished. (Participant 9)

Fathers learned and were able to apply new skills for more effective parenting and enhanced father-child interactions.

It was more as a playmate... You know but now you know we find constructive things to do together. You know like afterschool activities, we go to counseling and everything like that. You there are just more ways that I can be productive.

(Participant 1)

Some learned strategies that helped with conflict resolution. Additionally, these skills provided fathers with skills to diffuse precursors to child maltreatment.

Stay calm, cool and collected whereas again there were times when I wouldn't. I would yell instead of just trying a different approach. Now doing that, trying something different has helped. Just giving it a chance. Not raising my voice.

They like to see that. You know what I mean. It taught me that it does take two you know. (Participant 3)

There would have been a time I would have just grabbed somebody. It just don't work no more. I don't want them to be abusive in their family or the next generation. I want them to look at the situation. If you can't figure it out then come back to it later. That's what I'm learning. (Participant 4)

He is absorbing everything. He is watching. He is a little parrot, he's going to you know say what he wants. You have to teach him. (Participant 9)

You know, I couldn't see myself that's what I said at one point the spankings I just couldn't do it. It hurt me to do that... And then from the educational standpoint from all the classes and things I went through it was more of what are

you going to do differently? How do you you know get your point across without having to be physical you know what I'm saying. (Participant 10)

**Communication.** Fathers overwhelmingly acknowledged that the F.O.C.U.S. program helped them to communicate more effectively with their children. Fathers offered multiple examples about strained communication with their own parents; thus, fathers wanted to change this pattern with their children.

I don't cut him off. I let him finish you know and tell him how expression is important and don't be afraid to make sure you tell me how you are feeling because I want to know. I don't want to make you feel any less or feel like you don't have a voice because you do (Participant 1)

I mean, my communication I think with her is more better, it's better than what it was. I mean we had a good relationship as far as being open and honest but I just talk to her different. It's just something that I feel you know. I haven't really just pinpointed it out just yet. (Participant 10)

Fathers also spoke about being intentional with how they communicated with their children.

I would say there is a plan in action now... there is a plan in action through the communication, verbal and non verbal with my child especially my daughter there is now how I pick up on her cues, tone of voice, trying to listen. (Participant 5)

One father compared his experiences growing up and his change of perspective since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program as "old school vs. new school". "Old school"



referred to his own childrearing and methods passed intergenerationally. “New school” indicated tools he gained through the F.O.C.U.S. program.

I’m able to listen to it now you know. I’m able to listen... You know how some parents say ‘no I don’t want no part of it’. Now I can hear it and say I will think about it. It’s not that quick no anymore. (Participant 4)

## **Relationships**

**Father-child relationship.** While only two fathers initially described father-child conflicts, all fathers noted improvements in their relationships with their children. Fathers reported that they spent more quality time with their children and acknowledged the impacted of their physical as well as emotional presence to their overall health of the father-child relationship.

I spend more time... When it’s time to pick him up we pick him up, we go to judo, we do other stuff together, we do our homework together. And so as far as being productive and just being there every day he knows I’m not going anywhere. And now he has the security of knowing that his dad is not out there running the streets... (Participant 1)

He loves to cook with me. Um so you know he is going to be really good at that. I like doing his homework with him. We love to ride motorcycles and bicycles. Um we are really cool with that. (Participant 7)

We had a class on proper, good healthy interaction with our children and what we all thought that was and what they thought that was and how we could all work

together. ..We spend quality time together. We put down the phone, we turn off the tv, and we read. Or I will color with her. And that's one of the biggest things we talked about. It just not spending time with your kids but spending quality time where they know that they are loved instead of just here is something to do and I am going to sit over here and play on my phone. (Participant 8)

Fathers described their children as their number one priority which was perspective shift. Additionally, fathers valued the notion of parenting with intention. Fathers reported that they were more connected to their children and used parenting methods that were not haphazard.

What it is now, you know I know that nothing else matters but the kids. They come before everything else that I do. I mean I work for them, I teach them, I love them, I nurture them. I try to make sure that the discipline is set in place to where they don't make the same mistakes to where they get off the beaten path and starting doing the wrong thing. (Participant 1)

[Before]I didn't really put the thought behind it as much. It was more like robot or automated type of role of father as to what I should to do. Going to their programs there is more thought behind, more intention behind what is going on and so. (Participant 5)

Every breath, every word I say and speak it impacts the people who are in my atmosphere whether I acknowledge it or whether I am even cognizant that that is

happening. It made me live more deliberately I think. And where it comes to my child it definitely made me more purposeful. (Participant 7)

When I started educating myself about what I should be doing as a father that I became more consistent as to like when I come home work I'm obviously tired, exhausted but that's not going to give me an excuse to not spend time with my son. (Participant 9)

**Co-parenting relationship.** Half of the fathers had contentious or difficult relationships with their children's mothers. Through the program fathers stated that they learned the value of maintaining a respectful outlook about mothers. Moreover, fathers shared that disrespecting the mothers ultimately impacted the children negatively.

From the program we definitely learn more about how much the impact taking the father out of the picture effects on a child just as it would the mother too. They both are going to play an important part to the children's health and development. If one part of that is faulty or missing it effects the child's growth and development. (Participant 5)

One of the things that stuck with me probably right up there on top of the list was how to interact with her mother. You know I have interacted with her a few times. Before you know I hated her... when she was around before all of this went down she was a good mom you know. She was there. She took care of her. She did all the good stuff and things just went wrong. (Participant 8)

...we are not going to call her 'baby mama'. We are going to call her the mother of child because we give her respect always even if the situation was tumultuous you did these things, you got physical, you still give her that respect...(Participant 10)

### **Role Perceptions**

Prior to completing the program, fathers defined their role as providers, role models, and nurturers. Additionally, the majority of fathers described varying levels of physical and emotional presence in their children's lives. The ways in which fathers were involved varied but they were engaged nonetheless. Examining fathers' perceptions post-F.O.C.U.S. offered new information. Perception changes resulted from adjustments in caretaker status and enhanced ideas about the role of fathers. While four of the participants stated their role perceptions did not change, all fathers acknowledged that the program heightened their knowledge about father roles.

**Fathers as full-time caretakers.** Fathers' experiences as full-time caretakers were unique and unexpected given the typical demographics of child welfare involved families. Six fathers were the sole caretakers for their children. Five of the fathers were granted custody of their children through a reunification plan with CPS. According to the fathers, the mothers failed to meet the mandates issued by CPS and the family court; thus, custody was granted to the father. One father was the sole caretaker of his children prior to the start of the child welfare case and his children were returned to his care. This was an unexpected demographic characteristic of the sample.

**Increased understanding of father role.** Fathers reported that they understood their roles in the family but the F.O.C.U.S. program enhanced or broadened their role perceptions.

Being in the F.O.C.U.S. program basically defined the role of father...I'm brought up in the old school. I'm raising my kids up in the new school. It's not like how it was when I get beat for everything. It just taught me something different like how to talk to them, ignore them, move on, How to reward them, how not to reward them. Everything is new school in this group. (Participant 4)

Realizing that not everything falls on me as the father. The mother is also responsible as well. I think understanding those roles and responsibilities of the mother and father through the program that kind of enlightened me in a way.

(Participant 5)

Some fathers shared that they never anticipated being the sole caretaker for their children; thus, filling both parenting roles was an unexpected change which brought some challenges.

Being a single parent you really don't have too much feedback to go on and you are kind of everything. You know you gotta be the gentle side which was maybe the wife's role or vice versa it doesn't matter. (Participant 3)

Well um I never I guess I never thought I would be a single dad. One of the things I learned in that class is it's actually not that difficult I guess. I mean it's got its challenges. But um I guess before the class I'd always thought about like she was

going to be there, her mom was going to be there and she would have her role and I would have my role. And um one of the things I picked up is it's not really not like that in any situation. It's not so cookie cutter like mom does this and daddy does this. (Participant 8)

Well the current situation right now is he has primary residency with me. And I am really grateful for that... When I get home I have to change his diaper. I am the cook, the janitor, I'm the you know the life coach, the authority figure. So that's lots of change. (Participant 9)

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a demographic description of the 10 fathers who participated in this study. This chapter summarized the procedures for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Fathers completed a demographic questionnaire and participated in a semi-structured interview. The interview questions were designed to illuminate fathers' lived experiences about role perceptions; factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement; and fathers' perceptions of the impact of the F.O.C.U.S. program on the father-child relationship, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors . Verbatim transcripts were used first to develop codes and then themes. Procedures for data analysis were detailed including examples of coding schemes. First and second cycle coding were used to reduce data into themes. Three major themes emerged from the data: Physical and Emotional Presence, Challenges, and Adaptability. Subthemes also emerged which aligned with each major theme. The theme Physical and Emotional Presence

yielded subthemes father roles- provider, role model, nurturer as well as love and commitment to child(ren). The theme Challenges produced the following subthemes: co-parenting struggles, substance use/abuse, unexpected triggers, and single fatherhood. Finally, the theme Adaptability produced subthemes parenting skills, relationships, and role perceptions.

CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION  
**Introduction**

This study explored the lived experiences of fathers formerly involved in the public child welfare system who completed a community based fatherhood program. Specifically, the study explored fathers' perceptions about: (a) the father's role, (b) factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement; and (3) the impact of the fatherhood program on the father-child relationship, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 fathers. The fathers' reported experiences were transcribed verbatim and used to produce themes. The theoretical frameworks, symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model provided the lens used to explore the following research questions:

1. What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family with their children?
2. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate father involvement?
3. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder father involvement?
4. What are fathers' perceptions about the impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?
5. In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
6. What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?



This chapter presents an overview of the findings, and concomitantly reveals the connections between the research questions, interview questions, previous research, and study themes. Connections between the findings and theoretical frameworks are integrated into this section as well. Finally, study limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

### **Discussion of the Findings**



*Figure 2: Theme development*

As shown in Figure 2, a number of factors informed the study themes. Theory was a critical component of the current study. As previously stated, the current study utilized three theoretical frameworks: symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model. Phenomenology provided a philosophical perspective for understanding fathers' shared experiences, and the meanings they assign to these

experiences. Additionally, theory informed the research and interview questions as well as the data coding, data reduction, and theme development processes. The following section discusses the themes and subthemes, and also provides discourse concerning their juxtaposition to previous research and the adopted theoretical frameworks. Research questions and corresponding interview questions are included to provide further context.

### **Physical and Emotional Presence**

The impact of father absence on child outcomes is a key issue noted in the public child welfare and fathering literature (Brown et al., 2009; Coady et al., 2013). Thus, many fatherhood programs emphasize father presence and involvement in the child(ren)'s life as an integral factor for positive child outcomes. The main theme, Physical and Emotional Presence, addressed research questions one and two. The literature noted that fathers were directly involved with caring for their children in myriad ways (Cabrera et al., 2000). Constructs of father involvement included dimensions related to physical presence in children's lives. For example, Lamb et al. (1985) highlighted interaction (measurable contact through caretaking and shared activities) and availability (the probability of interaction with the child). Lamb (1986, 2000) re-envisioned this model to account for the importance of both physical and psychological presence (accessibility) of fathers in their children's life. Additional researchers characterized fathering, father roles, and father involvement using cognitive, affective, generative, and emotional components (Dollahite et al., 1996; Palkovitz, 1997; Pleck, 2010). Thus, the literature highlighted components that support the notions of physical and emotional presence, a noted theme in

this study. The literature also underscored the role characterizations, which were presented as subthemes. The theme, Physical and Emotional Presence, generated two subthemes: 1) fathers' roles – provider, role model, and nurturer; and 2) love and commitment to child(ren).

### **Fathers' Roles – Provider, Role Model, Nurturer**

Table 6

#### *Research Question One and Corresponding Interview Questions*

| <b>Research Questions</b>   | <b>Interview Questions</b>  |
|---|---|
| <b>RQ1) What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family with their children?</b> | <p>IQ1) What do you think are your roles and responsibilities as a father?</p> <p>IQ2) What was your belief about the role of fathers in the family before completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ3) Thinking about your feelings now, describe your paternal role in the family. Has there been a change in your thoughts about your role? If so, how?</p> <p>IQ12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> |

When asked about their role within their family, fathers responded with multiple descriptions, three of which occurred most frequently. The researcher noted the three role characterizations as: (1) providers, (2) role models, and (3) nurturers. It is noteworthy that the only study with a similar sample found a comparable characterization of father roles in the family (Coakley, 2013b). The themes of fathers as providers, role

models/examples, and nurturers are supported in other non-empirical and empirical studies. Fathers as provider or breadwinner aligns with previous research describing early conceptualizations of father roles (Lamb, 2000). Fathers in this study recognized that providing for their children's and/or family's basic needs are important functions. Although the researcher did not ask fathers to assign role rankings, provider was typically mentioned early on in the discourse, which may indicate a level of saliency, as indicated in identity theory. Fathers offered examples of financial support, which included providing food, clothes, and shelter. Fathers as providers was also indicated in Grief et al.'s 2007 study, which explored fathers' participation in a court mandated child abuse prevention/treatment program. Dolan (2014) noted that although fathers served as nurturers, traditional roles like provider remained prominent. Empirical and non-empirical data from previous literature characterized father roles in families as providers, guides or role models, as well as nurturers (Coakley, 2013b; Lamb, 2000; McAdoo, 1993; Murray & Hwang, 2015). Likewise, the responses offered by fathers in the current study reflected these themes. Additionally, literature emphasized the affective functions of fatherhood (Dollahite et al., 1996; Palkovitz, 1997; Pleck, 2010), as fathers are increasingly responding to and understanding the impact of their involvement on their child(ren)'s emotional well-being.

Role model was also an emergent role description. One father shared his desire to serve as a sex or gender role model, as he wishes to demonstrate to his daughter how men should treat women. Father as a gender role model was supported in the work by Lamb

(2000). Additionally, Lamb (2000) reported fathers served as models for morality or religious practices. One father described himself as a “believer” and wanted to ensure that his children understood the value of religion as evidenced by his own behaviors. The literature also described father roles as one of mentor and teacher. One father reported that his job is to set the standard for his child’s behavior and interactions with others. Summers et al. (2006) described teaching and mentor tasks as demonstration and modeling. This notion closely aligns with the subtheme of fathers as role models.

Lastly, fathers as nurturers also emerged as a remarkable role descriptor. Identity theory suggests that self-perceptions influence aspects of role behavior (Henley & Pasley, 2005; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Similar to “fathers as providers,” fathers as nurturers” was a role identified initially by many of the study participants. Likewise, the responsible fathering model suggests that role identity influences father involvement. Aspects of fathers’ roles as nurturers were displayed through emotions (e.g., “love my children”) and also through measurable behaviors (e.g., “learning to paint finger nails”). Literature described nurturance as a form of demonstrative affection, encouragement, quality time, and strong communication (Julion et al., 2007; Summers et al., 2006). Fathers also equated nurturing with physically “being there” for their children, and providing emotional support during times of triumph and challenges. This finding was similar to the Forste et al. (2009) finding that suggests even when the father-child relationship is rocky, fathers remained committed to providing emotional support. Two fathers shared

experiences of raising teenagers. One father reported that during times of conflict, maintaining emotional connections with his children was hard but important.

Fathers in the current study were asked questions about their roles, responsibilities, and role perceptions prior to completing the F.O.C.U.S. program. The fathers provided a myriad of descriptions of their roles in the family. This supports the notion that fatherhood is multidimensional, as suggested by a number of researchers including Cabrera et al. (2000), Lamb (2000), and Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2004). Moreover, this multidimensionality is explained via symbolic interactionism—roles have careers and change based on current norms and expectations.

Cultural expectations are also a featured contextual factor in the responsible fathering model. This model suggests that cultural factors may have a positive impact on fathering (Doherty et al., 1998). Having fathers serve in multiple family roles may result in positive family functioning. Role salience, as described in identity theory, offers deeper understanding. Although fathers were not asked to rank roles, information gleaned from the data suggested that some roles were more prominent than others based on certain situations or the developmental stage of the child. This was understood from direct actions or fathers' reported behaviors that aligned with stated roles. Role perceptions supported through role behavior, is also a noted component of identity theory (Styker & Burke, 2000).

## Love and Commitment to Child(ren)

Table 7

*Research Question Two and Corresponding Interview Questions*

| Research Question  | Interview Questions   |
|--|---|
| <b>RQ2) What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate father involvement?</b> | IQ4) What does being an involved father mean to you?  |
|  | IQ5) What makes it easier to be involved with your child(ren)?  |
|  | IQ7) Describe the ways you spent time with your child(ren) prior to completing the F.O.C.U.S. program.  |
|  | IQ12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program? |

The Love and Commitment subtheme aligned with research question two, which explored fathers' perceptions about factors that facilitate father involvement. Palkovitz (1997), Dollahite et al. (1996), and Pleck (2010) suggested that fathers connect with their children emotionally through actions (e.g., hugging and kissing), cognitively (i.e. parental priorities and role meaning), and through building secure attachments (i.e. responding to the child's needs). The researcher asked, "What does being an involved father mean to you?" Fathers offered descriptions of duties and expectations and described their strong affection for the children. Additionally, fathers described behavioral aspects that demonstrate their love or affection for their children, such as setting limits, planning special times together, and communicating feelings of affection. A third of the sample, reflected upon how they looked forward to becoming fathers. One participant described his prenatal experiences and emphasized, "I was there" when discussing the birth

experience. Another participant suggested that it was easy to involve himself with his son because he loves him. Essentially, the father's love for his children provided motivation for involvement with them.

Fathers also demonstrated a strong commitment to being there and involved with their children. When fathers made involvement a priority or they viewed the parental role as salient, levels of reported involvement were impacted. This finding was supported by identity theory, which suggests that the level of role salience may influence role behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Additionally, the responsible fathering model indicates that commitment to the parental role and role identification influences levels of involvement (Doherty et al., 1998). Many of the fathers in this study looked forward to stepping in the role. More than half (n=7) expressed feelings of obligation as a motivator for involvement. Fathers identified strongly with this role. They reported taking the responsibility seriously such that they adjusted their behaviors to support raising their child. This finding was particularly interesting given six of the fathers were the sole caretakers. Fathers may have felt that being uninvolved was not a choice especially since five of the fathers became caretakers after meeting conditions outlined in their child welfare case. Also, the interactions between fathers and their children were critical.



## Challenges

Table 8

### *Research Question Three and Corresponding Interview Questions*

| <b>Research Question</b>   | <b>Interview Questions</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>RQ3) What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder father involvement?</b> | <p>IQ6) What gets in the way of being involved with your children?</p> <p>IQ8) Have you changed the type of activities and/or the amount of time you spend with your children since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> |

Challenges emerged as another major theme. While the researcher attempted to explore facilitative factors for father involvement (research question 2), data from this area revealed conditions about factors that hinder involvement (research question 3). Nevertheless, facilitative factors were noted in this study's Love and Commitment for Child(ren) subtheme. Five subthemes emerged related to challenges: co-parenting struggles, substance use/abuse, father-child conflict, unexpected triggers, and single fatherhood. Previous literature underscored co-parenting challenges, substance use/abuse, and father-child conflict as factors that hinder father involvement (Carlson et al., 2008; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011; Rockhill et al., 2008; Waller & Swisher, 2006). On the other hand, unexpected triggers and single fatherhood as barriers to father involvement were not supported in previous scholarship.

The researcher attempted to illuminate fathers' perceptions of the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of involved fathers. This was a critical component to

operationalizing a myriad of conceptualizations of father involvement found in the literature, and connections to fathers' perceptions. Symbolic interactionism suggested that the self is influenced by social interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Interactions are reciprocal by definition (Stryker, 1980, 1987) and may impact role behaviors (Anderson et al., 2015). Thus, interactions between fathers and children, fathers and mothers, as well as fathers and service providers may influence fathers' role behaviors and overall involvement. As stated in Chapter I, father involvement is greatly influenced by external behaviors. The responsible fathering model (Doherty et al., 1998) examines interactions or relationship aspects of father involvement within three domains: quality of the co-parenting relationship, individual father factors (substance use/abuse), and contextual factors (unexpected triggers and single fatherhood). The domains are represented in the subthemes of the main theme, Challenges. These domains offered an ecological framework for examining factors that impact father involvement.

### **Co-parenting Struggles**

Previous studies suggest that the level of cooperation or conflict in the co-parenting relationship impacts father involvement (Carlson et al., 2008; Jia & Schoope-Sullivan, 2011). Brodie et al. (2014) reported that co-parenting challenges also impacted involvement levels of fathers involved with public child welfare. The findings of the current study were partially aligned with previous literature. Two-thirds of the fathers in the study indicated some level of co-parenting challenges with their child(ren)'s mother ranging from issues related to parenting practices to father-mother conflict. While some

acknowledged intermittent conflict, others were engaged in ongoing, contentious interactions with the mothers (n=3). Despite the fact that co-parenting challenges as a barrier to father involvement was supported in the literature, these challenges presented differently for fathers in the current study. Fathers in the current study shared challenges related to parenting choices, negotiating maternal visitation, and managing maternal hostility. These issues were not presented in current literature; thus further research is warranted.

As stated in Chapter II, current research on co-parenting relationships relies on data from the Fragile Families and Child Well Being study where mothers were overwhelmingly the primary caretakers. Fragile Family fathers were often non-resident, whereas 70% of the fathers, in the current study, lived with their children, and 60% were the primary caretaker. These demographic factors may impact how co-parenting challenges present in these families, as compared to the current literature.

### **Substance Use/Abuse**

Four fathers discussed their substance use and its impact on the family and father involvement. For example, one father's drug use led to incarceration and a lengthy separation from his children. Others acknowledged that their impairment due to drug use was the primary reason for their referral to child welfare. Moreover, in these families, children were removed from their parents' care and placed in foster care, thus, fueling the creation of visitation rules and restrictions. These rules as discussed by the fathers in the current study were noted as challenges to father involvement. One father noted that

because of his drug use, visits were supervised. This restriction may have impacted how he engaged with his child. Furthermore, temporary placement in the home means fathers could not see their children whenever they desired. Fathers acknowledged the role substance use/abuse had on their parenting, involvement, and ability to care for their children. The findings in this current study corroborated the previous literature. Substance use was categorized as individual factors, personal problems that impacted father involvement (Coakley et al., 2014). Stykes (2015) noted that substance use is linked to lower levels of father involvement. Additionally, Waller and Swisher (2006) argued that substance use is linked to poor parenting and less time spent caretaking.

### **Unexpected Triggers**

Data details how separation from one's family impacts the children who are placed in foster care (Berger, Bruch, Johnson, James, & Rubin, 2009; Doyle, 2007); yet, little research examines the parents' experience after child removal, or the lingering impact the separation has on future parental functioning. In this study, each father discussed the impact of separation from his children, and how involvement with the child welfare system influenced his fathering behaviors and the father-child relationship. This was an unexpected outcome and was completely supported by the literature regarding fathers' experiences. Moreover, the researcher could not locate any literature that explored residual effects of child welfare involvement on fathers after case closure, or any longitudinal studies examining post-intervention paternal functioning. Although the majority of fathers (n=7) experienced "positive" case outcomes meaning their children

were returned to their care or remained in their homes, they also reported a multitude of emotions about this experience and its lingering impact. Symbolic interactionism suggests the actions of others may impact individual self-concept (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Fathers, in this study, described feelings of anger, sadness, confusion, hypervigilance, paranoia, shame, and loss of parental self-efficacy as a consequence of their child welfare case.

Parental responses to child welfare involvement while children were in foster care or placed for adoption have been documented. One analysis examined three qualitative studies performed in England, Norway, and Sweden. Parents relayed feelings of grief, loss, anger, stigma, and threats to parental identity (Schofield et al., 2011). Parents reported that their status and identity as parents changed as a result of their children having been placed in foster care (Schofield et al., 2011). Similarly, Memarnia, Nolte, Norris, and Harborne (2015), in their study of birth mothers, noted similar emotional responses—grief, loss, and trauma. Although not all of the fathers had children in foster care, all experienced some level of reactivity as a result of the child welfare intervention.

### **Single Fatherhood**

Single fatherhood as a challenge to father involvement was an unexpected subtheme and was not supported by the literature. Fathers who were sole caretakers (n=5) appeared relatively comfortable in this role; yet, each spoke about challenges he confronted as a single dad. Although single fatherhood has quadrupled since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Coles, 2015), fathers reported issues related to gender bias and double standards.

For example, one father reported difficulty securing economic support (e.g., rejected for nutrition supplements) because the program was for women, infants, and children. The father believed those in authority judged him because he was serving in the nontraditional role of stay-at-home, single father. Although statistics detailed demographic shifts in family formations, cultural expectations, as evidenced by this father's experience, are misaligned. Fathers also reported difficulty with transitioning into the role of single dad. Feelings of social isolation and parental inexperience were noted. Yet, transitioning into fatherhood brings an amount of normative stress, which results in fathers requiring additional information and social support (Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008).

### **Adaptability**

Table 9  
*Research Question Four and Corresponding Interview Questions*

| <b>Research Question</b>   | <b>Interview Questions</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>RQ4) What are fathers' perceptions about the impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?</b> | IQ9) Describe your relationship your child(ren) before you completed the F.O.C.U.S. program?  |
|  | IQ10) Describe your relationship your child(ren) after completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?   |
|  | IQ11) What strategies do you use to help address conflict or tough times in the father-child relationship? From whom or where did you learn these strategies?   |
|  | IQ12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program? |

Table 10

*Research Question Five and Corresponding Interview Questions*

| <b>Research Question</b>  | <b>Interview Questions</b>  |
|---|---|
| <b>RQ5) In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</b> | <p>IQ2) What was your belief about the role of fathers in the family before completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ4) Thinking about your feelings now, describe your parental role in your family. Has there been a change in your thoughts about your role. If so, how?</p> <p>IQ12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> |

Table 11

*Research Question Six and Corresponding Interview Questions*

| <b>Research Question</b>  | <b>Interview Questions</b>  |
|---|---|
| <b>RQ6) What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?</b> | <p>IQ7) Describe the ways you spent time with your child(ren) prior to completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ8) Have you changed the types of activities and amount of time you spend with your child(ren) since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ9) Describe your relationship with your child(ren) before you completed the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ10) Describe your relationship with your child(ren) after completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> <p>IQ12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program?</p> |

Adaptability was the last main theme. Data for this theme represented fathers' ability to address changes in parenting, relationships, and role perceptions. Moreover, this theme connected program impact to the factors: father-child relationships, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors. Father-centered interventions seek to increase the quantity and quality of father involvement (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Research questions four through six explored fathers' perceptions of program impact on the father-child relationship, role perceptions, and fathering behaviors. The findings suggested that the F.O.C.U.S. program provided fathers with a variety of tools that they implemented in their parenting or adopted in an effort to improve father-child relationships. Furthermore, the program impacted fathers' attitudes and beliefs about parenting practices and father roles. Note that this study was not a program evaluation; however, the research questions have an assessment undertone. The findings, still, were more descriptive than evaluative. Three subthemes emerged from discourse: (a) parenting skills, (b) relationships, and (c) role perceptions. Fathers shared stories that illustrated their perceptions of behavioral and/or attitudinal changes in these areas. The majority of the fathers acknowledged that participation in the F.O.C.U.S. program provided them with the tools to implement change and/or created an avenue for dialogue about these issues.

### **Parenting Skills**

Parenting services are designed to help parents develop or sharpen nurturing-responsiveness skills (i.e., communication skills and reassurance) and child management techniques (i.e., providing positive attention and clear directives) (Casanueva et al.,



2008). The F.O.C.U.S. program is a mandated intervention due to allegations of child maltreatment. Child abuse prevention and intervention services are designed to (a) improve parenting skills, (b) improve child outcomes, and (c) reduce risk for future maltreatment (Johnson et al., 2008). It is unclear if the acquisition of new skills led to a change in role perceptions, but findings do support changes in role behaviors. It is remarkable that one study using identity theory found that positive feedback influenced fathers' level of commitment (Henley & Pasley, 2005). Fathers reported general improvement in parenting skills, and the acquisition of better communication skills as impactful. Fathers reported using skills such as active listening, watching for verbal and non-verbal cues, conflict resolution tactics, and communicating in an age appropriate manner. Moreover, fathers expressed a desire to communicate with their children in a positive way that did not happen in their families of origin. Fathers communicated more openly with their children and used new communication strategies to negotiate and problem solve with their children. Similarly, findings from an evaluation of the DADS Family Program corresponds with this study's findings concerning fathers who are more open to children's self-expression (Cornille et al., 2005). Gearing et al. (2008) reported better paternal communication skills following an eight-week parenting intervention. However, Gearing et al. (2008) also found that the fathers were unable to sustain gains at the three-month follow-up. Unlike fathers in the Gearing et al. (2008) study, fathers in the current study reported that they still utilize most learned skills. All fathers completed the program at least one year prior to the start of data collection.

Previous research suggests that fathers benefit from parent training (Byrne et al., 2013; Kaminski et al., 2008; Lundahl et al., 2008). Moreover, researchers agreed that behavioral and skills-based training promotes positive parent-child relationships and the prevention of child maltreatment (Barth et al., 2005; Whitaker et al., 2005). Findings in the current study were supported by research in this area as well. Fathers noted improvements or enhancements to their parenting skills. Fathers recounted using skills learned in the F.O.C.U.S. program to diffuse anger, resolve conflicts, employ alternatives to corporal punishment, address developmental challenges, and increase paternal self-efficacy. Other skills included choosing battles with child, time-outs for child and father, creating routines, and recognizing triggers. These skills may be helpful to reduce occurrences of future child maltreatment.

### **Relationships**

The improvements in the co-parenting and father-child relationships emerged from study data. Consistent with previous research conducted on the F.O.C.U.S. program (Gallagher et al., 2014), fathers revealed they value the importance of a positive co-parenting relationship. The responsible fathering model suggested that cooperation, mutual support, and conflict in the co-parenting relationship impacts father involvement. Fathers reported that positive relationships with mothers ultimately benefit their children. Additionally, valuing the role of mothers in the parenting relationship and their influence on child outcomes informed fathers' perceptions about the important role they play as well in their children's growth and development. This finding mirrored data from a study

on an intervention with divorced fathers (Cookston, Braver, Griffin, DeLuse, & Miles, 2007). Cookston et al. (2007) found that programmatic focus on improving child well-being could also improve inter-parental relationships. Moreover, the fathers from the Cookston et al. (2007) study reported they maintained positive perceptions and prosocial behaviors with mothers over time. Similarly, fathers in the Feinberg and Kan (2008) study of an eight-week parenting invention for couples reported an increase in parent closeness following intervention. Although, in this study, most fathers with tumultuous relationships did not report a sense of closeness to mothers, fathers reported refraining from speaking about mothers with disparaging language in front of their children.

Prior studies have shown improvements in father-child relationships post parenting/fatherhood program intervention (Gallagher et al., 2014; Julion et al., 2007; Robbers, 2005). The majority of participants (n=8) reported gains, concerning the father-child relationship, in the areas of engagement, warmth, and responsiveness. Most of the fathers in this study were the primary caretakers for their children, which may make this finding unique. Fathers reported changes in the quantity and quality of time spent with their children. Furthermore, fathers noted that their children were their first priority. Finally, fathers reported having engaged in recreation as well as caretaking activities with their children.

### **Role Perceptions**

Nine of the fathers were involved with their child(ren) prior to participating in the F.O.C.U.S. program. Prior to F.O.C.U.S., fathers described their roles primarily as

providers, role models, and nurturers. These characterizations were supported in the previous research (Lamb, 2000; McAdoo, 1993; Olmstead et al., 2009; Summers et al., 2006). Fathers reported that participation in the F.O.C.U.S. program enhanced their understanding of the paternal role in the family. The ways in which fathers interacted with their children changed. Fathers' narratives indicated a shift in expectations regarding the father-child interactions. Fathers described the myriad roles they play in the family; these descriptions supported the notion that father roles are dynamic and multi-dimensional (Cabrera et al., 2000; Olmstead et al., 2009; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004).

Surprisingly, six fathers were the primary caretakers for their children. This shift in residential status had a profound impact on fathers. The responsible fathering model suggests father's residential status impacts father involvement (Doherty et al., 1998). Additionally, issues of availability/accessibility, and the frequency of father-child interactions (Lamb et al., 1985; Lamb, 1986, 2000) may impact fathering behaviors. Coles (2015) noted that single fathers' involvement with their children and household duties increases as fathers begin to internalize the single-parent role. Fathers reported that they serve multiple roles, some of which were described in gendered terms (e.g., mommy roles), and were not anticipated. Symbolic interactionism theory stated that roles have careers that remain for a certain time but are replaced based on current norms and expectations (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). These single fathers indicated that serving multiple roles in their families was now required given their present circumstances.

### **Reflections as a Researcher**

The researcher's interests in father involvement and interventions with fathers currently and formally involved in public child welfare were influenced by her own experiences as a child welfare professional for over 10 years. Although the researcher has years of experience as a child welfare professional, little was known about fathers' experiences with child abuse intervention/prevention programs, their perspectives about their paternal roles in families, or how they understand father involvement. The researcher believed that this unique population of fathers had tumultuous relationships with child welfare professionals and varying levels of disconnect from their children for various reasons including substance use/abuse, economic constraints, and strained romantic relationships with their child(ren)'s mothers. This was the researcher's prior experience. Patton (2002) suggested that self-awareness and self-analysis are requirements for qualitative inquiry. The process of reflexivity allows the researcher to sort through issues during data analysis and report writing (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research challenges the researcher to bracket his or her experiences and perspectives to examine the phenomenon with less bias (Moustakas, 1994). Use of a reflexive journal throughout the research process allowed for the researcher to reflect on her biases and reactivity to the research experience.

The research experience provided the researcher with an increased desire to continue advocating for fathers through research. The fathers' candor in the interview and noted experiences provided the researcher with multiple perspectives to consider when

exploring this population. Moreover, fathers' experiences did not always align with the researcher's preconceived notions; thus, the researcher had to abandon her own experiences to consider and appreciate these fathers' shared experiences. Through journaling, peer debriefing, and consultation with academic advisors, the researcher remained vigilant about personal bias. It is the researcher's sincere hope that this research adds to the existing body of knowledge and serves as a springboard for future research in this area.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study adds to the discourse on father role perceptions, father involvement, and the impact of parenting interventions by presenting the lived experiences of a unique population of men. Nevertheless, this study has limitations. The first limitation is the number of participants. Initially, the researcher anticipated interviewing 15-20 fathers. Nineteen expressed interest but due to eligibility requirements and non-response at follow-up, 10 fathers were included.

Lack of diversity of the population is another limitation. White men were the most represented group, a result the researcher did not anticipate. This limitation perhaps was the result of recruitment and response patterns of the participants. The majority of the participants were from a Texas county (Collin) with a predominately white demographic. This may explain the lack of diversity in the study sample. Diversity of experiences was another limitation. Fathers were not compelled to participate in this study; thus, the use of volunteers may have excluded fathers who had different experiences than those

represented in the study. Additionally, fathers who participated reported positive experiences with the F.O.C.U.S. program. In fact, most of the fathers shared that they participated in the study because of their appreciation for the program; thus, fathers with a less positive program experience were not represented in the study.

Qualitative interviews provided deep insight into fathers' experiences, perceptions, and motivation. Exploring father-child relationships was critical in this study. Yet, research on issues such as father-child relationships relies on the perspective of the adults (Forste et al., 2009). Including a naturalistic element would have added a deeper dimension to the study. Regarding measurement, reliance on self-report and retrospection should be addressed in future studies. Fathers' reports may be overstated; adding reports from children, mothers, or program staff to corroborate fathers' perspectives may have provided an alternative understanding of father involvement. Although this study illuminated fathers' perspectives, family research relies too heavily on the voices of fathers using nonrandom samples (Coles, 2015).

### **Implications**

Based on study data and findings, a number of implications may be impactful for family scientists, child welfare professionals, and fatherhood programs.

#### **Implications for Family Practitioners/Educators**

- Practitioners and researchers should continue to explore the multifaceted roles fathers play in families and whether role perceptions influence fathering behaviors. It is important to understand these roles and role perceptions using data

from non-residential fathers, two-parent homes, divorced families, and single father-headed households.

- Create curricula that address the changing roles of fathers in families and how these changing roles or perceptions impact fathering behaviors. Curriculum should also integrate aspects that explore the challenges of father involvement, specifically factors that support and inhibit father involvement. Particular attention should be given to the influence of the co-parenting relationship on father involvement. Family scientists should also consider contextual factors (e.g., substance use) that impact father involvement, and assist fathers and their families with developing strategies to address these issues.
- Design and implement fatherhood programming in the community by integrating current research with evidence-based practices. Family science professionals, particularly Certified Family Life Educators (C.F.L.E.), are in a unique position to offer their expertise in this area and develop programs that meet the needs of the fathers who are a part of their family system.
- Partner with child welfare agencies and other established community organizations to deliver fatherhood content in a non-threatening, supportive manner. Collaboration with established institutions such as churches or other men's groups may serve as an avenue through which fathers can easily access the services when mandated and/or desired.



- The fathers in this study needed additional support at certain times. Family scientists may want to consider developing programs for after-care services. Fathers shared that their post-intervention reintegration caused some disruptions such as changes in family structure (e.g., fathers assuming role of primary care-taker). These disruptions may require a period of on-going professional support. Providing prevention and after care services may help reduce the likelihood of future child maltreatment and help to increase fathers' level of parental self-efficacy.

### **Implications for Child Welfare Professionals**

- Father-centered programs that meet their unique and varied needs are tremendously important. Some fathers definitely require more of the training that parenting education offers, especially if they have not been actively involved in rearing their children or they identify parenting deficits. However, in certain situations fathers may need more of a supportive environment. Thus, it is important to assess for the needs and knowledge base of the fathers, while also trying to provide services to address issues of child maltreatment.
- In terms of father roles, it is important for social workers to understand that fathers serve a variety of roles in the family, including provider or breadwinner. Therefore, any programming or interventions need to account for the dynamic roles of fathers in families. In the current study, fathers stated that emotional support was just as important as financial provision.

- Regarding child welfare services, the researcher suggests an improvement and increase in professional development and training, so child welfare employees may better understand the role of fathers. Moreover, this training should demonstrate to workers how to engage fathers in services and support sustained levels of father involvement.

### **Implications for Fatherhood Programs**

- Create or continue with existing curricula that examines father roles and the importance of father involvement. The fathers in the current study clearly gained additional insights about these issues from participation in the F.O.C.U.S. program.
- Fatherhood programs should highlight effective communication strategies to improve co-parenting and father-child relationships. Increased communication skills served as a flashpoint for the fathers, in the current study, and a critical area for skill development in parenting education, as suggested in the literature.
- On-going evaluation of programs via qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches is important to accessing the changing needs of fathers and to ensure that all program objectives are met. Results of these evaluations should establish the foundation for evidence-based practices.
- Although the current study did not seek to understand why fathers were impacted by the F.O.C.U.S. program, fathers shared that connections made with other fathers and program staff added value to their experiences. Fathers identified with

the facilitators who were male and fathers. More programs where fathers or males are the facilitators may be beneficial.

- Fatherhood programs may also want to consider the relationships they have with Child Protective Services. Although the fathers in this study shared a positive connection with F.O.C.U.S. program staff, the genesis of the relationship may have fostered some level of mistrust. One father was very candid about this fact and concluded that the F.O.C.U.S. program staff encouraged maintaining status quo. It is unclear if this impacted how fathers engaged in the program, but further examination maybe warranted.
- Fatherhood programs may also consider this issue of parent training versus parent support. While the fathers did gain some concrete parenting skills, many were in need of ongoing emotional support. It was valuable to the men in this study to engage in cognitive as well as emotional aspects. It may be important for fatherhood programs to distinguish between training and support or integrate both aspects as needed.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for future research:

- Use of a variety of research methods would be useful. Case studies or naturalistic approaches may yield richer data, thus allowing for more in-depth analyses of fathers' post-intervention experiences. Quantitative approaches such as pre- and

post-testing would help to gather a baseline of functioning, which could be used later to interpret attitude and/or behavior changes.

- The majority of the sample consisted of single fathers who served as sole caretakers. Future research should include perspectives of non-residential fathers and married fathers. Including a variety of family formations may provide a multifaceted perspective about how resident and relationship status impacts role perception and father involvement.
- Parenting and fatherhood interventions have shown promise in previous research; however, evaluations of evidence-based practices, particularly with father-centered programs, are needed. Utilizing a longitudinal design may also yield important findings about behaviors and perceptions over time.
- Previous studies have overwhelmingly relied on mothers as data sources. Practitioners in both family sciences and child welfare should understand the perspectives of the identified clients, fathers.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the shared experiences of fathers formerly involved in the public child welfare system who completed a community based fatherhood program. Fathers were recruited from the Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support (F.O.C.U.S.) program as a result of a case, that is currently closed, with Child Protective Services. Recruitment began upon receiving consent from the Texas Woman's University Institutional Review Board and

the Graduate Division. The researcher used a gatekeeper through the F.O.C.U.S. program to assist with recruitment. Ten fathers consented to and participated in face-to-face, semi-structured, individual interviews with the researcher.

The study explored six research questions regarding fathers' perceptions concerning: (a) the father's role, (b) factors that facilitate and/or hinder father involvement, and (c) the programs impact on the father-child relationship, role perceptions, and fathering behavior. Symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and the responsible fathering model served as the theoretical guides for this study. The researcher adopted a phenomenological approach, which allowed her to explore self-meaning and perceptions as described by the study participants. This chapter included a discussion of the findings, while highlighting the themes and subthemes that arose through data analysis. Additionally, the chapter included the researcher's reflections, limitations of the study, implications, and recommendations for future research.

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## APPENDIX A

### Electronic Recruitment Letter



### Electronic Recruitment Message

Subject Line: Seeking Participants for Study on Fathering Experiences Former F.O.C.U.S. Program Participants

Would you like the opportunity to talk about your experiences with fathering and what helps or keeps you from being involved with your children? You would participate in an individual interview lasting approximately 30-90 minutes. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. You will be provided a copy of the results upon requests. As a “thank you” for participating, you will receive a \$20 gift card.

Questions would explore your fathering experiences, roles, expectations, father-child relationships, and co-parenting relationships. Participation is voluntary, and you have the option to stop answering questions and/or stop participating at any time. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of fathers perceptions of their roles in their families as well as factors that support and/or hinder involvement with their children.

The first phase will be individual interviews which will last between 30 to 90 minutes. The second phase will be follow-up conversation via e-mail, telephone or in person to review answers provided by you, the participant (if needed). The last phase is voluntary where you review can review transcripts from the interviews and make edits.

All research has the potential for risk or harm to participants. All necessary steps will be taken to minimize the risks of this study. The following is a brief list of potential risk: loss of confidentiality, loss of anonymity, emotional discomfort resulting from recalling past experiences, and loss of time.

If you would like additional information concerning this study, I would be happy to speak with you by phone at 510-xxx-xxxx about the specifics. You can also contact me at [fmurray@twu.edu](mailto:fmurray@twu.edu). There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, and internet transactions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Felicia Murray  
Doctoral Candidate  
Texas Woman’s University  
Department of Family Sciences

## APPENDIX B

### Consent to Participate in Research

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Bringing fathers into focus: The lived experiences of fathers who completed a community-based fatherhood program

Investigator: Felicia Murray.....fmurray@twu.edu 510/207-6904  
Advisor: Shann Hwa Hwang, PhD.....shwang@twu.edu 940/898-3155

Explanation and Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study for Mrs. Murray's dissertation research at Texas Woman's University. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the fatherhood experiences of men who completed the Fathers Offering Children Unwavering Support (F.O.C.U.S.) program. This study will examine fathers' perceptions of their roles and factors that support or hinder their involvement with their children. Additionally, this study will explore roles definitions, role expectations, perceptions about the impact of the F.O.C.U.S. program, and quality of the father-child relationship.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you meet the following criteria: (1) you are male and a father; (2) you are 18 years or older; (3) you were referred to the F.O.C.U.S. program as a result of a case with Children's Protective Services concerning your biological child(ren); (3) you completed the F.O.C.U.S. program and are no longer enrolled in the F.O.C.U.S. program; and (4) you do not have an open case with Children's Protective Services at this time.

Description of Procedures

There are potentially four parts to this study: an in-person semi-structured interview; a follow-up interview (if necessary); a process called member checking (optional); and review of course pre-post tests. As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend 30 to 90 minutes of your time in a face-to-face interview with the researcher, Mrs. Murray. The researcher will ask you questions about your fathering experiences, relationship with your child(ren)'s mother(s), and your relationship with your minor child(ren). The in-person interviews will take place at one of the F.O.C.U.S. program offices. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed word for word by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of what you have said.

A follow-up interview may occur via telephone and/or in-person to clarify any questions or further explain statements gleaned from interview. This will occur on an as needed basis. It is anticipated that this process should not exceed 45 minutes.

Finally, participants will be invited to participate in a member checking process. If a participant chooses to volunteer, he will be provided with a verbatim transcript of his interview to offer corrections or clarify any statements made during the interview process. The amount of time needed for this process is strictly determined by the participant. Participation in the member checking process is strictly voluntary.



\_\_\_\_\_ Initials

## Potential Risks

### ***Emotional Discomfort or Distress***

A possible risk in this study is emotional discomfort or distress with these questions you will be asked. If you become tired or upset you may take breaks as needed. You may also stop answering questions at any time and end the interview without penalty. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you can stop participating in this study at anytime without penalty.

The interview will be held at the F.O.C.U.S. program offices. Returning to the program offices may also create a level of discomfort.

If you feel you need to talk to a professional about your discomfort, the researcher will provide you with a list of resources.

### ***Loss of Confidentiality***

Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. If a participant discloses information regarding new allegations of abuse and/or neglect of a child(ren), the researcher is mandated by law to report this information. If the researcher suspects child abuse may have occurred, the researcher is also bound by law to report these allegations to the proper authority. In this instance, confidentiality will not be maintained.

All identifiable information will be coded and master lists maintained by the researcher. A code name or other non-descript label Participant #1, not your real name, will be used during the interviews. Only the researcher will know your real name. The recordings and the written interview notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office.

The researcher will maintain all passwords and the file cabinet key. The researcher and her major advisor, Dr. Shann Hwa Hwang, will be the only persons that have access to the audio recordings. Two peer reviewers and possibly the researcher's major advisor will review paper copies of the transcripts to assist with data analysis. The peer reviewers have been trained in the protection of human subjects and other researcher training offered by the Texas Woman's University. All paper copies will be returned to the researcher.

Any information including transcriptions will be stored on a computer in password protected files and/or a locked file cabinet maintained by the researcher, Mrs. Murray. Only the researcher will know the password and maintain the file cabinet keys. The researcher's major advisor and two (2) research team members will have access to the full transcripts. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all e-mail, downloading, and internet interactions.

The result of the study will be shared for educational purposes. Your name or any other identifying information will not be included. Additionally, results will be shared with the F.O.C.U.S. program but no identifying information will be included. Your participation in this research project will not affect your status with the F.O.C.U.S. program. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any time, your status with the F.O.C.U.S. program will not be affected.

|  |
|--|
| Approved by the<br>Texas Woman's University<br>Institutional Review Board<br>Date: 10/9/15 |
|--|

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials

### ***Loss of Time and Fatigue***

Loss of time and fatigue are additional risks. The semi-structured interview will each last between 30 to 90 minutes each. You will be allowed to take breaks as needed. You can also end the interviews at any time.

### ***Loss of Anonymity***

Loss of anonymity is another potential risk. Participant's identifying information will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's office. All transcriptions, recordings, and emails will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's office. All identifiable data (transcriptions, recordings, email addresses, and mailing addresses) will be stored on either a password protected USB drive locked in the researcher's file cabinet, password protected cloud storage, or as hard copies stored in the locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office.

Interviews will take place at F.O.C.U.S. class locations. The researcher will make every effort to insure that interviews occur in a private setting and not during scheduled classes.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

If you understand the potential risks associated with this study, please initial below.

### **Participation and Benefits**

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you would like to know the results of this study the researcher will e-mail or mail them to you. You will receive a \$20 Walmart gift card to compensate you for your time and travel expense.

### **Questions Regarding the Study**

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their phone numbers are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via email at [IRB@twu.edu](mailto:IRB@twu.edu)

Approved by the  
Texas Woman's University  
Institutional Review Board  
Date: 10/9/15

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

**Member Checking**

\*If you would like to review your verbatim transcript and provide feedback (member checking process), please print and sign your name below and provide the requested contact information.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Or

Mailing Address:

\*If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

or

Address:

Approved by the  
Texas Woman's University  
Institutional Review Board  
Date: 10/9/15

APPENDIX C  
Community Resources

## **Community Resource List**

### **Free or Low Cost Counseling Services**

1) TWU Counseling and Family Therapy Clinic

Human Development Building 114

P.O. Box 425769

Denton, TX 76204

(940) 898-2600

[www.twu.edu/family-sciences/counseling-family-therapy-clinic-asp](http://www.twu.edu/family-sciences/counseling-family-therapy-clinic-asp)

Hours: Tuesdays – Fridays 9am to 8pm

Saturdays 9am to 3pm

2) UNT Dallas Counseling Clinic

7300 Houston School Road

Dallas TX

(972) 780-3646

Hours: Mondays 3:30pm to 6:30pm

Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30pm to 8:30pm

3) Center for Family Counseling

SMU in Plano

5528 Tennyson Parkway, Building 3, Suite 102

Plano

(972) 473-3456

### **Other Counseling Resources**

Psychologist Locator of the American Psychological Association Practice Organization

<http://locator.apa.org>



## APPENDIX D

### Demographic Questionnaire

## Demographic Questionnaire

Participant # \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) What is your age?  
☐ 18-24 years old  
☐ 25-34 years old  
☐ 35-44 years old  
☐ 45-54 years old  
☐ 55-64 years old  
☐ 65 years or older
- 2) Please specify your racial/ethnic background.  
☐ Asian/Pacific Islander  
☐ Black or African American  
☐ Hispanic or Latino  
☐ Native American or American Indian  
☐ White  
☐ Other: Please list \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is your current marital status?  
☐ Single  
☐ Married or domestic partnership  
☐ Widowed  
☐ Divorced  
☐ Separated
- 4) Number of children \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Do you live with your child(ren)?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
- 6) Employment Status (Please check all that apply)  
☐ Employed  
☐ Out of work and looking for work  
☐ Out of work but not looking  
☐ Student  
☐ Unable to work

- 7) Yearly income  
\_\_\_\_ \$10,000 or less  
\_\_\_\_ \$10,001 - \$20,000  
\_\_\_\_ \$20,001 - \$30,000  
\_\_\_\_ \$30,001 - \$40,000  
\_\_\_\_ \$40,001 - \$50,000  
\_\_\_\_ \$50,001 - \$60,000  
\_\_\_\_ \$60,000 or higher  
\_\_\_\_ Decline to state
- 8) Year completed F.O.C.U.S. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Guide

## **Interview Guide**

The interview questions listed in this guide were developed in an attempt to understand fathers' role perceptions and perceptions of factors that facilitate or hinder father involvement and impact of program intervention. The research questions are:

1. What are fathers' perceptions of their roles within the family?
2. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitate their involvement with their children
3. What are fathers' perceptions of factors that hinder their involvement with their children?
4. What are fathers' perceptions about impact the F.O.C.U.S. program had on their relationship with their child(ren)?
5. In what ways have fathers' perceptions of their role within the family changed since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
6. What changes in fathering behaviors have occurred since the completion of the F.O.C.U.S. program?

The interview questions were designed to encourage a free-flow of conversation. The goal is to ask all of the questions indicated in the protocol; however, some questions may be excluded depending upon the interaction with the participant. The interview should end when the participant seems to have answered as many questions as possible to the best of their ability or if the participants wish to terminate the interview.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews (30 to 90 minutes)**

All interviews will be conducted by Felicia Murray. At the start of the interviews, the interviewer will share information about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, share the interview instrument, and discuss any other issues of ethics that may affect the study.

**Interviewer:** Thank you for coming and for participating in this research study. The study purpose will be read verbatim from the informed consent document. Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns?

**Interviewer:** Today, I am going to talk with you in detail about your fathering experiences.

**Questions:**

- 1) What do you think are your role(s) and responsibilities as a father?
- 2) What was your belief about the role of fathers in the family before completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
- 3) Thinking about your feelings now, describe your parental role in your family. Has there been a change in your thoughts about your role. If so, how?
- 4) What does being an involved father mean to you?
- 5) What makes it easier to be involved with your child(ren)?
- 6) What gets in the way of being involved with your child(ren)?
- 7) Describe the ways you spent time with your child(ren) prior to completing the F.O.C.U.S. program.
- 8) Have you changed the type of activities and amount of time you spend with your children since completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
- 9) Describe your relationship with your child(ren) before you completed the F.O.C.U.S. program?
- 10) Describe your relationship with your child(ren) after completing the F.O.C.U.S. program?
- 11) What strategies do you use to help address conflict or tough times in the father-child relationship? From whom or where did you learn these strategies?
- 12) Are there any additional comments that you would like to add or clarify regarding your role in the family, your involvement with your children, the father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program?

Interviewer: This concludes our interview. Are there any additional comments you like to add or clarify regarding your roles in the family, your involvement with your children, father-child relationship, or the F.O.C.U.S. program?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. If needed, I will contact you with follow-up questions based on the information you provided.

At the conclusion of this study, the results will be made available to any participant who wishes to review them. If you have any other questions at a later time, please feel free to contact me.

## APPENDIX F

### Member Checking Instructions



### **Member Checking Instructions**

I want to thank you again for participating in my dissertation study on fathering. Attached are verbatim transcriptions of our interview. I have reviewed the transcripts and made notes about my thoughts or our conversation and made connections to larger themes. Participant numbers have been used to ensure confidentiality.

Please read through the transcripts, notes, and themes checking for accuracy of my interpretations to your answers. If you believe that I have mis-stated anything, please feel free to correct the information and return your corrections to me via email or phone. If you feel that I have captured your statements accurately, please inform me via email at [fmurray@twu.edu](mailto:fmurray@twu.edu) or via telephone, 510-xxx-xxxx.

## APPENDIX G

### Demographic Characteristics of Study Population

F.O.C.U.S. Program Demographics thru October, 2015

| <b>Variable</b>            | <b>Category</b>        | <b>N</b> | <b>n</b> | <b>%</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Race</b>                |                        | 974      |          |          |
|                            | Caucasian              |          | 399      | 42%      |
|                            | African American       |          | 291      | 31%      |
|                            | Hispanic               |          | 215      | 23%      |
|                            | Multi-Ethnic           |          | 16       | 2%       |
|                            | Asian American         |          | 9        | 1%       |
|                            | Native American        |          | 13       | 1%       |
| <b>Relationship Status</b> |                        | 921      |          |          |
|                            | Married                |          | 212      | 23%      |
|                            | Separated              |          | 201      | 22%      |
|                            | Never Married          |          | 241      | 26%      |
|                            | Living Together        |          | 168      | 18%      |
|                            | Romantically Involved  |          | 92       | 10%      |
| <b>Employment Status</b>   |                        | 921      |          |          |
|                            | Part-time              |          | 104      | 11%      |
|                            | Full-Time              |          | 505      | 55%      |
|                            | Self-Employed          |          | 103      | 11%      |
|                            | Unemployed             |          | 209      | 23%      |
| <b>Income</b>              |                        | 857      |          |          |
|                            | >\$10k                 |          | 313      | 37%      |
|                            | \$10k-\$19k            |          | 183      | 21%      |
|                            | \$20k-\$29k            |          | 149      | 17%      |
|                            | \$30-\$39k             |          | 97       | 11%      |
|                            | <\$40k                 |          | 115      | 14%      |
| <b>Age</b>                 |                        | 974      |          |          |
|                            | Avg age                |          | 37.26    | years    |
| <b>Number of Children</b>  |                        | 912      |          |          |
|                            | Avg number of children |          | 2.26     | children |

APPENDIX H  
IRB Approval Letter



**Institutional Review Board**  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378  
email: IRB@twu.edu  
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: September 16, 2016

TO: Ms. Felicia Murray  
Family Sciences

FROM: Institutional Review Board (IRB) - Denton

*Re: Extension for Bringing Fathers into Focus: The Lived Experiences of Fathers Who Completed a Community-based Fatherhood Program (Protocol #: 18193)*

The request for an extension of your IRB approval for the above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU IRB (operating under FWA00000178) and appears to meet our requirements for the protection of individuals' rights.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. If subject recruitment is on-going, a copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

This extension is valid one year from October 9, 2016. Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any unanticipated incidents. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Karen Petty, Family Sciences  
Dr. Shann Hwa Hwang, Family Sciences  
Graduate School



**Institutional Review Board**  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619  
940-898-3378  
email: [IRB@twu.edu](mailto:IRB@twu.edu)  
<http://www.twu.edu/irb.html>

DATE: October 9, 2015

TO: Ms. Felicia Murray  
Family Sciences

FROM: Institutional Review Board - Denton

*Re: Approval for Bringing Fathers into Focus: The Lived Experiences of Fathers Who Completed a Community-based Fatherhood Program (Protocol #: 18193)*

The above referenced study has been reviewed and approved at a fully convened meeting of the Denton Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 10/9/2015. This approval is valid for one year and expires on 10/8/2016. The IRB will send an email notification 45 days prior to the expiration date with instructions to extend or close the study. It is your responsibility to request an extension for the study if it is not yet complete, to close the protocol file when the study is complete, and to make certain that the study is not conducted beyond the expiration date.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt prior to any data collection at that agency. A copy of the approved consent form with the IRB approval stamp is enclosed. Please use the consent form with the most recent approval date stamp when obtaining consent from your participants. A copy of the signed consent forms must be submitted with the request to close the study file at the completion of the study.

Any modifications to this study must be submitted for review to the IRB using the Modification Request Form. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All forms are located on the IRB website. If you have any questions, please contact the TWU IRB.

cc. Dr. Karen Petty, Family Sciences  
Dr. Shann Hwa Hwang, Family Sciences  
Graduate School