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The Impact of Parenting Education and Resources on the Development of the Fathering Role

Bruce S. Sheppard

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THE IMPACT OF PARENTING EDUCATION AND RESOURCES ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FATHERING ROLE

by

BRUCE S. SHEPPARD

FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chair: Dr. Gary Tiffin, PH.D.

Members: Dr. Karen Buchanan, Ph. D. and Dr. Patrick Allen, Ph. D.

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This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:


11/17/14 

Date

Gary Tiffin, PhD

Committee Chair

Associate Professor of Education

11-17-2014 

Date

Karen Buchanan, EdD

Professor of Education

11-17-2014 

Date

Patrick Allen, PhD

Professor of Education

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is an inquiry into how men perceive their roles as fathers, how they developed those roles, and the influence those roles have on the success of their children. Interviews were conducted by the author with fourteen men who had previously participated in a prenatal class for new, first-time fathers. The transcribed data from these interviews were triangulated with interview notes, case notes, and a study journal. The data were also reviewed for accuracy through post-transcription telephone interviews with three of the interviewees. Five important themes emerged through analysis of the interview data: a) the men saw themselves in a combined role as educators, guides, nurturers, and protectors of their children, b) they saw themselves as fathers first, c) they learned how to be patient with their children, d) they learned how to be fathers from relationships with other adults, and e) they helped their children succeed by letting them take risks and make mistakes. The research and themes generated two theories concerning the development of the fathering role: a) Fathers can be engaged and active participants in the parenting of their children, and b) Men develop their role as a father from their experiences with their own father.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Beginning in the 1980's and picking up steam in the 1990's, the majority of research into the influence fathers have on their children shifted toward the effects of positive father involvement upon their children's health, social, and developmental outcomes. In the United States, several initiatives from the executive branch of the federal government had a major impact on this transformation. The first initiative was the Family Reunion II: the Role of Men in the Lives of Children—a conference in July, 1994 in Nashville, TN, sponsored by then Vice-President Al Gore. This conference brought together experts from around the country to discuss the role of men in the lives of children, focusing mostly on fathers. Another initiative was an executive order issued in 1995 by then-President Clinton for all federal agencies to review their programs and make sure fathers were included and engaged in all federal programs that concerned families (Brotherson & White, 2007). Currently, President Obama's *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood* initiatives (The White House, 2011) are designed to enhance the support and education of fathers.

Since the mid-1980's numerous researchers, such as Cabrera, Shannon and Tamis-LeMonda (2007), Day and Lamb (2004), Brotherson and White (2007), and Pleck (2010) have studied the social and educational outcomes of children when their fathers are involved in their lives. Research has focused on a broad range of positive outcomes for children such as increased academic achievement (Allen & Daly, 2002), or improved cognitive development (LeMenstruel, 1999). Some research has been concerned with specific types of father involvement, such as

paternal solo care (Wilson & Prior, 2009). Still other research has examined the influence of father involvement at a specific developmental stage for children (Dubowitz, et al., 2001). Included in the body of research on father involvement since the 1980's are studies of the negative effects of the absence of father involvement on their children (Balcom, 1998). However, research into effective and evidence-based father support and education has been limited (addressed in the literature review).

In response to the research into general father involvement, federal, state, and local government, as well as non-government entities such as hospitals have created numerous curricula for fathers. These curricula provide support and education to fathers who want to initiate, increase, and/or continue their involvement in the lives of their children. One example of a curriculum is: *It's My Child Too*, which was developed by Purdue University (Rausch, 2000) with a grant from the State of Indiana, to develop a father support and education curriculum specifically for fathers who had recently left jail or prison. The Indiana Cooperative Extension Service judged this curriculum to be well constructed, so the developers revised it to be appropriate for all types of fathers, not just those recently incarcerated. Another example of a curriculum in support of fathers is *Boot Camp for New Dads*® (<http://www.bootcampfornewdads.org>), which has grown to be a prolific father education program since its inception in 1990 and is currently taught in over 300 sites in the United States.

Today there are numerous websites and organizations dedicated to the mission of meeting and supporting the educational needs of fathers. One such website is the Nation Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse co-managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and The White House (2011). This website contains links to federal statistics, information, and programs as well as vetted links to non-profit father support and education organizations.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of developing fatherhood for men using a set of fathers who had participated in the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshop. Specifically, I conducted personal interviews with a sample of former workshop participants. Through these interviews I examined their perceptions of their current role as a father, as well as their perceptions of the knowledge and skills they have gained since becoming a father.

Research Questions

I employed qualitative exploratory research methods which are research techniques of exploring the parameters of a population or program without a preconceived agenda or theory to prove. The research questions were designed to elicit the opinions and feelings of fathers and were more general in nature, as compared to research questions designed to focus in on one idea of phenomenon. The data gathered from the interviews and their subsequent analysis refined these initial research questions and resulted in new research questions at the end of the study. This fulfilled a primary purpose of qualitative research-to develop new theories and avenues of inquiry. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question # 1

What do men learn about being a father and how have they learned it?

Research Question # 2

In what ways do fathers perceive their roles in the overall development of their children?

Research Question # 3

What additional experiences and events have impacted their role as a father?

Definition of Terms

Absent Fathers – Fathers who have phone and/or personal contact with their children less than once a week. Although most of the fathers in this definition are non-residential fathers, residential fathers can be considered absent fathers if they interact with their children less than once a week. This term also includes men who have completely abandoned their role as a father.

Class Coach – A leader or teacher of a *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshop.

Data Saturation – In qualitative research it is the point in which the majority of responses from participants are similar to responses from earlier participants.

Elementary Age Child – Children enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade.

Father Education – Formal and informal instruction designed to impart good fathering practices to the participants.

Father Support – Personal contacts and resources designed to enhance the father's ability to fulfill his fathering role. This could include therapy groups, individual counseling, or helping fathers to access tangible resources such as health insurance.

Infant – A child from birth through 18 months old.

Involved Fathers – Fathers who have phone and/or personal contact with their children once a week or more. This includes non-residential as well as residential fathers.

Preschooler – A child from 30 months old until she/he enters kindergarten, typically sometime after the child turns five years old.

Rookie Dads – First time fathers who participated in a *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshop.

Toddler – A child from 18 through 29 months old.

Veteran Dads – Fathers who previously participated in a *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshop, and have returned to a session to help lead the class when their babies are from two to six months old.

Limitations and Delimitations

In this study I used a non-probability sample of former participants in the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshop. This non-probability sample is a delimitation since the information gained from this study was not generalizable to all fathers. However, the information gained from this study could be used to generate theories to research that would be applicable to other sets of fathers.

Since the primary research method was personal interviews, a delimitation of this study is that while the data gathered provided much information and a depth of understanding of the issue, they were not representative of a broad sample of the experiences of former workshop participants.

In order to focus the study on the long-term development of the participants' roles as fathers, the sample excluded former program participants whose first child was at the time of the study in the infant or toddler age range, which is a delimitation of the study. The data in the set of former workshop participants included the father's first name, last name, phone number, and the year he participated in *Boot Camp for New Dads*®.

An additional delimitation was the primary use of the telephone to contact the potential participants. This option excluded from the sample fathers whose phone information was not current, but who might have otherwise been available for the study.

A final delimitation was my vested interest in the success of fathers. I strove to be open-minded throughout the study, guarding against the social desirability effect, researcher bias, and a priori theories.

Summary

The role of the father can have an important impact on the development and academic success of their children. A study of the development of the fathering role in men who began their fatherhood journey with a parent education course could reveal important insights into this process.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The continuous cycle of crisis and reform of public school education in the United States has generated a wealth of investigation and debate regarding what children need in order to succeed in school. Since the beginning of the 21st Century, the American public has experienced *No Child Left Behind* with its high stakes testing, and President Obama's *Preschool for All* initiative with its emphasis on how early childhood education prepares children to be ready to learn in kindergarten. In Oregon, Governor Kitzhaber has promoted his 40/40/20 plan where all children will graduate high school with 40% going to college, 40% going to technical school or community college, and 20% going directly into the workforce.

Within these and other education reform efforts, the concepts of parent involvement with their children at home and parent engagement with schools have been touted as important components of the success or failure of children's learning (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). Historically, parent involvement has primarily meant mother involvement (Brotherson & White, 2007).

In the past 400 years there have been four different eras, or historic trends, concerning fathering and the family in American society (Pleck, 1987, Pleck & Pleck, 2007). From the time of the Puritans through the earliest days of nationhood, the role of the father was one of a moral guide or teacher (Pleck, 1987, Pleck & Pleck, 2007). As America entered the industrial revolution the primary role of the father became that of the breadwinner of the family. When this country entered the Great Depression, New Deal era, and World War II, the father was seen as

principally a sex-role model for their sons. This concept was greatly influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and others (Lamb, 2000). Starting about the mid-1970's the fourth era of the new nurturing father (Pleck, 1987, Pleck & Pleck, 2007) came about, which has continued into the twenty-first century.

Beginning in the late 1970's psychologists and sociologists began to examine father involvement in their research. The initial focus was the quantity of time fathers spent with their children rather than the quality of time (Lamb, 2000). Beginning in the 1990's the focus shifted to the investigation of the qualitative aspects of the father-child relationship. Specifically, in the past twenty years educational and sociological researchers such as Randal Day, Michael E. Lamb, Natasha Cabrera, and Joseph Pleck (Day & Lamb, 2004), studied the effects of positive father involvement, or the lack of such involvement, on the educational, psychological, and sociological outcomes of their children.

This literature review will examine what the research reveals concerning five themes of family and father involvement. Those themes are, a) family involvement and positive parenting influences on child outcomes; b) the effects of the absence of father involvement on their children; c) the relationship between negative father involvement and child outcomes; d) the effects of positive father involvement on the outcomes of their children; and e) prenatal intervention and support of fathers, and the effects those practices have on the father's long-term interactions with their children.

Parent-Child Interaction Theories

There are three theories most commonly used to describe how the relationship between parent and child is an important influence on positive child outcomes (O'Connor & Scott, 2007).

One of the theories is Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). Social Learning Theory is concerned with the way in which direct and indirect experiences are related to how children behave and perform. In this theory children learn from the actions of others as well as how others respond to them. The parent-child relationship and family environment are the primary learning settings for social learning (O'Connor & Scott, 2007).

Another theory is Attachment Theory, which describes how a child is connected or attached to a parent or other significant adult, as well as the quality of that relationship (Bowlby, 1988). Children can develop secure or insecure attachments to an adult depending upon the warmth and receptiveness of that adult. Although there is a strong relationship between secure attachment and positive child outcomes, secure attachment does not guarantee positive outcomes in children, nor does insecure attachment guarantee negative outcomes (Bowlby, 1988).

The third theory is Parenting Styles Theory (Baumrind, 1971). In this theory Baumrind has identified warmth and control as the two most effective strategies parents employ with their children. Her classic parenting styles were constructed from combinations of positive or negative forms of the two strategies. Authoritative parenting consists of high warmth and positive control. Authoritarian parenting combines low warmth and high control. Permissive parenting contains high warmth and low control. Neglectful/disengaged parenting encompasses low warmth and low control. The implication of Parenting Styles Theory is that authoritative parenting is the most desirable parenting style, which in turn is most likely to produce the best outcomes in children (Baumrind, 1971; Macoby, 1992; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997). The high warmth and high control of authoritative parenting entails good parent-child interactions and provides age appropriate limits within which children can grow and learn in safe, secure environments.

A significant amount of the research into family involvement and positive parenting has been connected with one of these three theories of parenting. Social Learning Theory has informed the study of parenting in terms of the parent-child relationship and the effect of the child's own behavior on responses from those she/he associates with. Grotevant and Cooper (1985) found that a child's self-image depends on the value of his/her relationship with a parent. The engagement of a parent with addictive behaviors such as smoking (Green, Macintyre, West, & Ecob, 1990) and alcohol (Hicks, Krueger, Iacono, McGue, & Patrick, 2004) produced children who were more likely to engage in those behaviors as adolescents and adults. Mothers with lower levels of positive parenting had children with more externalizing behaviors, such as consistent emotional and behavioral outbursts (Boeldt et al., 2012). Parents who were constructively involved with their children were more likely to have children who achieved positive outcomes such as good health, and social and cognitive skills. (Crouter & Head, 2002).

Attachment Theory also has much to say concerning positive parent involvement. Adolescents who, as an infant, experienced a secure attachment with a parent or other significant adult were more likely to have positive outcomes in high school (Feldman, Gutfreund, & Yerushalmi, 1998). Secure attachment in childhood is associated with popularity and positive social skills in teens (Lieberman, Doyle, & Markewicz, 1999). Secure attachments and better child outcomes in children were also associated with depressed low-income mothers who were provided home visits as compared to mothers who were not provided home visits (Lyons-Ruth, Connell, Grunebaum, & Botein, 1990).

Within Parenting Styles Theory authoritative parenting was more likely to produce children who have better cognitive and social outcomes (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss, 1999). Conversely, authoritarian parenting was associated with a higher

incidence of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Barkley, 1988). Responsiveness, which is an element of authoritative parenting, was associated with healthy brain functioning in infants (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

All three theories come together in brain research, particularly in terms of how children's relationship and interactions affect the growth and structure of their brains (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). The brain functions through synapses, the connections between brain cells. At birth, infants begin with only a small amount of the synapses which they will grow during their lives. In the early childhood years synapses are added by two means. The first method is an overproduction-loss process. During the early years the young brain overproduces synapses to the point where 700 fresh neural networks are formed every second. Then, through a pruning process by means of experiences, the synapses that are activated are strengthened and the underused synapses disappear (Center on the Developing Child, 2014). The second method is the addition of new synapses through experience, which is a process that continues through a person's lifespan (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009). These two ways in which synapses are added to a child's brain are both dependent upon healthy relationships with their parents. These verbal and social interactions between parents and children can be thought of as a *serve and return* relationship (Center on the Developing Child, 2014). Taken together, these synapse processes and relationships with others help define brain plasticity-the process by which a brain can grow and change (Center on the Developing Child, 2014). The most important relationship in early brain development is the *chiseling* of the young child's brain by their parents, whether the interactions are positive ones that result in good brain development, or negative ones (maltreatment) that create poor brain structures in children. (Belsky & de Haan, 2001).

A significant brain plasticity process in the brains of children that occurs during their early years is the development of language. During the first three years of life children rapidly acquire vocabulary and language skills. The most important way children develop their language skills during this time is through their relationships with significant adults. In a groundbreaking study Hart and Risley (1995) examined the language practices of families on welfare, working class families, and professional families. They found that on average by age three children from welfare families used 525 words whereas children from working class families used 749 words; children from the professional families used 1,116 words—double the amount of words used by the children from welfare families. As parents help children increase their language skills, the father's contribution to this language development in young children has a larger impact than that of the mothers. (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010)

All three parent-child interaction theories contribute to brain development. The emphases of Social Learning Theory on direct and indirect experiences, as well as the responses by others to the behavior of the child, have strong connections to both the overproduction-loss and addition processes of brain development. Under this construct the experiences children have with parents are crucial to how their young brains grow (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Attachment Theory is also related to brain development. It is strongly related to the overproduction-loss process in that secure or insecure attachments can provide an avenue of experiences which make certain synapses stronger and more likely to be retained (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009). Parenting Styles Theory has connections to both brain growth processes in that depending upon the parenting environment the child experiences, some synapses are retained and others are discarded. As the child continues to grow and learn, new synapses are added in

accordance to the degree of warmth and/or control they experience (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2009).

Father Involvement Defined

An excellent starting point for defining father involvement is a four-factor construct of the term: motivation, skills and self-confidence, social supports, and institutional practices. (Pleck, Lamb, and Levine, 1986). The father's motivation for involvement with his children stems from his personal history, his personality, and what he believes (Pleck, 2007). Skills and confidence includes fathers' self-perceptions of their abilities as well as their knowledge of child development (Pleck, 2007).

The social supports aspect of father involvement relates to the father's relationship with the mother of his children, as well as the support for his involvement he receives from friends and family (Pleck, 2007). The institutional practices component of this construct is in regards to the father's relationship with institutions that affect his involvement with his children. This would include his workplace policies, his relationship with social and religious organizations, and his involvement in his children's schools. (Pleck, 2007).

Employing this four-factor construct, father involvement has different meaning depending upon which factor is being studied or discussed. These four factors are the backdrop to be employed in looking at the consequences of both the negative and positive involvement of fathers with their children.

Negative Father Involvement

The Absence of Parental Involvement

In consideration of how positive parenting affects child outcomes, an important course of inquiry is to examine how father involvement is connected with how their children grow and develop. Research has been conducted on the relationship between father absence and the outcomes of their children. One of the earliest studies of the effects of the father's absence on children examined father deployment away from the family home in World War II during children's infant years (Stoltz, 1954). This study indicated those infants had difficulties in interactions with other children in their later early childhood years. Even though the findings of this study by Stoltz were significant, it was not until the 1970's that inquiries into father issues began to increase. At this point in time, father absence and its negative effects on children became the focus of research on fathers and children (Biller, 1974). The method of studying father involvement in terms of whether the father was present or absent was termed the binary approach (Lamb, 2000).

Michael Lamb examined the binary approach in the 1970's and 1980's and theorized that there were five consequences on families and children when fathers were absent (Lamb, 2000) . First, it created a staffing problem in that there were fewer adults to help with parenting responsibilities. Next, there were economic consequences since even with child support a family unit with just the mother and children had lower revenue sources. Also, there was the stress of depression and emotional issues on both mother and father as they parented separately. In addition, children felt a sense of abandonment which bore psychological consequences. Finally, if parents divorced and there was conflict during and after the divorce, the children's well-being could be affected. The negative effects on children from the absence of father had been thought to be primarily due to the lack of sex role modeling but according to Lamb (2010) those negative effects are more related to these five consequences.

The absence of father involvement can have a particularly strong impact on boys. When boys abandoned by their fathers become adults they can have difficulties with self-esteem, developing long-term relationships, and recognizing and expressing their feelings with their partners and their own children (Balcom, 1998).

Negative father behaviors.

Negative father involvement can have an important impact on the development of their children. General negative behaviors of fathers such as expressions of anger or drug/alcohol abuse are often related to negative school behaviors by their sons (Foster, Reese-Weber, & Kahn, 2007). In addition, abuse and neglect by either parent can have severe negative effects on the health and well-being of children. A common misconception is that fathers engage in these behaviors more than mothers. Compared individually with mothers, the odds of the fathers of harming children are higher. However, through a statistical analysis it was found that 40.8% of abused and neglected children were maltreated solely by their mothers, 18.8 % solely by their fathers, and 16.9 % by both parents together (Roseberg & Wilcox, 2006). This higher incidence of maltreatment by mothers was due to the higher amount of time children spend alone with their mothers as opposed to the lower amounts of time children spend with their fathers.

Emotional engagement can have an influence on a father's style of parenting. Emotional engagement is a term used to describe how people are involved and connected to another person, issue, or cause, in an emotional and responsive manner. If fathers are emotionally disengaged with their children, they are more likely to have psychological difficulties, although these effects can be reduced if the mother is emotionally engaged (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Baumrind's (1971) description of parenting styles can have an impact on whether the father's style of

parenting is related to negative or positive outcomes in their children. According to Phares and Clay (2007):

Overall, fathers whose parenting style is authoritative are likely to have children who feel secure with themselves and exhibit good mental health. Conversely, fathers who engage in authoritarian or permissive parenting are more likely to have children with poorer outcomes (p. 12).

Mental health issues.

Mental health complications in fathers have been linked to psychological complications and problems in their children (Phares & Clay, 2007; Connell & Goodman, 2002). Fathers who suffered from mental illness were more likely to have children with developmental delays (Barocas, Seifer, & Sameroff, 1985). If fathers had a major depression diagnosis, their preschool children tended to have more social skills difficulties with other preschool children than their peers (Dave, Sherr, Senior, & Nazareth, 2008; Weitzman, Rosenthal, & Liu, 2011).

In middle-aged or older fathers there is a greater possibility of having children and adult offspring with mental illnesses (Gray, 2011). This effect was stronger if the father was eleven or more years older than the mother (Krishnaswamy, Subramaniam, Ramachandran, Indran, & Aziz, 2011). In addition, middle-aged men have a 1.4 times greater risk of having children with a diagnosis of autism (Hultman, Sandin, Levine, Lichtenstein, & Reichenberg, 2010).

To summarize, the absence of father involvement, as well as negative behaviors and attributes of the father, can both have negative consequences on the outcomes of their children. Also, older fathers are more likely to have children with mental disorders or a diagnosis of

autism. However, most research into father involvement has been into the effects positive father involvement has on the outcomes of their children.

Positive Father Involvement

Since the 1980's, *positive father involvement* has been described in terms of three distinct segments: a) fathers' engagement with their children, such as activities and behaviors in one-to-one or small-group interactions; b) fathers' accessibility to their children, which comprised a quantifiable amount of time or occasions fathers were available; and c) fathers' responsibility for their children, such as partnering with the mother, monetary support, and support children's health and nutrition (Pleck, Lamb, & Levine, 1985).

These three segments contain elements of the three theories associated with family involvement and positive parenting: Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory, and Parenting Styles (O'Connor & Scott, 2007). Father engagement relates well to all three theories as a father interacts with his child and has an influence on the child's experiences, on the child's attachment to the father, and how the father develops his style of parenting. Father accessibility has elements of Social Learning Theory and Attachment Theory. This can come into play when the father is available for positive experiences that could shape the learning of the child as well as affect the strength of their attachment to the father. Father responsibility is most closely related to parenting styles as the father's responsible behaviors help form the parenting style he desires to employ with his children (Phares & Clay, 2007).

When fathers are positively engaged with their children, positive outcomes for the children can be the result. Supportive fathers can have a positive effect on children's cognitive and language development (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Martin, Ryan, &

Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Roseberg & Wilcox, 2006). When math and reading scores were measured in the fifth grade, children of fathers who engaged in early learning activities with them, such as reading to them or playing learning games, achieved better outcomes in these subjects (McFadden, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2012). Children who were read to by their fathers also tended to have higher IQ's, and were likely to have better educational outcomes (Nettle, 2008; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003).

The social skills of children can be affected by father engagement with their children. Positive physical play employed by fathers with their children resulted in a positive relationship with how preschool teachers rated the children's social skills (MacDonald & Parke, 1984). Children of engaged fathers were more likely to have a positive image with their peers and tended to have good relationships with other children (Allen & Daly, 2002). Children of engaged fathers also experienced lower rates of behavior problems and were more social (LeMenstruel, 1999). High quality father engagement, as compared to frequency or quantity, had a positive effect on their children's gender role development (Halle, 1999).

Several studies have examined the effect of father engagement on children's social skills at age six. Most children turn six during the year they are in kindergarten in the U.S., and it is in kindergarten that they are prepared for more intense learning in reading and math. In a multi-site study that examined children's outcomes through age six and the degree of father engagement at home, children of involved fathers demonstrated better cognitive skills and higher self-esteem (Dubowitz, et al., 2001). This effect was more noticeable at age six than at earlier ages. Fathers who paid particular attention to literacy skills with their children at home resulted in higher parenting confidence, a stronger relationship with their child, and a greater connection to their child's education (Clark, 2009). In one study of the influence of engaged fathers on their

child's behavior, father engagement made little difference at age four but had a strong influence on lower levels of aggression and depression in the children by six (Marshall, English & Stewart, 2001). Also at age six, children perceived themselves as being socially competent if they had a father or father-figure involved in their lives (Dubowitz, et al., 2001).

Father involvement studies have also focused on how responsible activities conducted by fathers can have a positive influence on outcomes for children. Brotherson and White (2007) use the term *generativity* when fathers' responsible behavior affects positive outcomes in their children. Generativity is defined as the act of caring for the next generation.

The father's accessibility to their children can also have a strong effect on their children's outcomes. Accessibility has had the least amount of research in the study of the father-child relationship. Pleck (2010) theorized that father accessibility has positive effects on children indirectly through the father's support of the mother and family. He also considered the positive influence children may have on the fathers themselves when the fathers make themselves more accessible (Pleck, 2010).

The 1996 National Household Education Survey (Chandler, 1996) sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics has become a treasure trove of information concerning responsible father involvement and child outcomes. This point-in-time survey included information from the parents of 16,910 children from kindergarten to 12th grade. One of the major results from this study indicated fathers from two-parent families had noticeably lower levels of school involvement than mothers. Single parent fathers had school involvement levels similar to single parent mothers, with positive academic results for their children when they were highly involved at their child's school (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997). In comparison to single

parent fathers who had low school involvement, children of highly involved single parent fathers achieved better in school, were active in extracurricular activities, and had lower levels of suspension or expulsion (Nord, 1998). In another study, LeMenstruel (1999) found that general parent involvement in their child's school had a positive effect on whether their children's academic achievement, but the father's involvement was more likely to produce a greater effect than the mother's involvement.

Pre- and Postnatal Engagement Studies

In the months before their child is born fathers may begin to anticipate their new fathering role. This anticipation may include early signs of attachment to their yet unborn child (Hjelmstedt & Collins, 2008). A father's support of, and responsible behaviors toward, the mother of his unborn child can have a positive influence on his increased involvement after his child is born (Cabrera, Shannon, West, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). These supportive and responsible activities include attending doctor visits, taking care of the home needs, and early engagement with the unborn child (e.g., attending the ultrasound appointments).

The development of a man into being a father can be shaped by stress, happiness, and intense support to mother and child (Ihinger-Tallman & Cooney 2005). The quality of a man's early experiences of fatherhood can positively influence his future engagement, accessibility and responsibility with his child. In consideration of this important point in time for the development of the fathering role in men, Cabrera, Fagan and Farrie (2008) hypothesized "...early timing of involvement, that is, fathers' support for their partner during the pregnancy and presence at childbirth, will be associated with increased levels of involvement with the child over time" (p. 1095).

Compared to research into the maternal influence on children, the body of research on the father-child relationship is quite small (Raeburn, 2014). There has been a limited number of studies undertaken that have examined the connection between pre- and postnatal fathering behaviors. Cabrerra et al. (2008) conducted one of the most important studies concerning the connection between prenatal behaviors in fathers and their subsequent fathering behaviors. They used data from the 2000 Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study to examine this connection. Out of an initial cohort of 5000 families, these researchers were able to use data from 1,686 fathers in tracking their prenatal and early postnatal fathering behaviors. Using a variety of control and mediator variables, Cabrerra and associates (2008) determined fathers who were more involved with their prenatal child and the child's mother were more likely to be more involved with the child at one year of age. In addition, these data revealed prenatally engaged fathers were much more likely to be employed and better able to support their families when their child reached the age of one. The trend of prenatally involved fathers' continued engagement with their children also held up at the third year of fatherhood (Cabrerra et al., 2008).

Another study by Scott, Steward-Strong, Manlove, and Moore (2012) also considered the connection between prenatal activities of fathers and their postnatal involvement with their children. This study examined data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth-1997 to see if there was a relationship between the prenatal behaviors of teen fathers and their later engagement with their child and the child's mother. They determined if the teen father was living with the child when the child was born, these same fathers were more likely to be living with their child years later when the fathers were in their early twenties.

An investigation using the data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Garfield, et al (2014) found that young residential fathers were at risk of depressive symptoms during a child's important attachment years of birth to five. Given the important role fathers play in early brain development in general and early language development in particular, the risk of depression in young fathers and their reduced interactions with their children can have a negative effect on these early development mechanisms.

Reported upon in 2011, a father and child research project was conducted using the Concordia Longitudinal Risk Project, an intergenerational and longitudinal set of data amassed in Montreal, Quebec (Pouget, Serbin, Stack, & Shwartzman). Using a sample of 138 families from these data the researchers concluded that positive father involvement in middle childhood predicted higher IQ and less internal behavior problems up to six years later.

Wood and Covington (2014) used data from Mathematica's Building Strong Families study to define the kinds of fathers who potentially could have lower involvement with their children. This study was conducted from 2002 through 2013 at multiple sites and examined healthy marriage and relationship education, as well as support service for unwed parents during the prenatal and postnatal development of the young family. Three years after enrollment in the programs evaluated by the Building Strong Families study these were the risk factors: lower partner relationship value coupled with father psychological pressure when starting the programs, fathering a child before the relationship, and the father being fatherless himself.

Among other goals, the Early Head Start Study of Fathers of Newborns sought to determine how fathers' relationship with their newborn infants changed over time (Vogel, Boller, Faerber, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2003). The study found that fathers who were resident

and more involved with their newborns were more likely to be involved with their children at six and fourteen months (Vogel, et al, 2003).

Much of the research into father involvement programs has been concerned with the immediate or short-term effects of those programs (Webster-Stratton, 1985, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Lamb, & Boller, 1999, Schock & Gavazzi, 2004, Mazza, 2002). In the field of father involvement studies a limited amount of research has been conducted into the longitudinal factors that may influence father behavior and development of his fathering role (Day & Lamb, 2004). In particular, there has been very little research into early interventions with fathers and the effects of those interventions on the father's long-term development of their fathering role. (Gadsen, Fagan, Ray, & Davis, 2004). Investigation is needed into the connection between early father development and long-term father behaviors. One way to do this might be to look into how fathers connect their early self-images as a father with subsequent self-images, their relationships with their children, and their parenting relationship with their child's mother (Marsiglio, 2004). Marsiglio proposes that in-depth interviewing would produce a fruitful line of inquiry for the studying of fatherhood development.

Conclusions from the Literature Review

Federal, state, and local governments have been concerned about improving the education system in the United States in order to help children complete their education with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college and in life. Family involvement and positive parenting can be an important element of this effort and can lead to positive outcomes for children. Although not studied as thoroughly as the role of the mother in parenting, the role of the father can be an important element of family involvement and positive parenting. In the

field of education, this relationship between positive father involvement and increased outcomes in children has the potential to serve as an important component of the infrastructure and initiatives school districts, state agencies, and the federal government employ in order to increase student achievement.

The absence of a father in the life of a child can have an influence on negative outcomes for that child. Also, experiencing negative behaviors by fathers will likely produce negative behaviors in their children. Conversely, engaged, accessible, and responsible fathers can produce positive outcomes in their children.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Introduction

This study explored the process of developing fatherhood for men. Data was used from personal interviews to explore the perceptions, experiences, and events that contributed to the development of participants' fatherhood roles. To guide this study the following research questions were used:

1. In what ways do fathers perceive their role in the overall development of their children?
2. What past experiences and events have impacted their role as a father?
3. What additional experiences and events have impacted their role as a father?

Using established research practices, this chapter will describe the setting as well as research design including: (a) participants, (b) sampling strategy, (c) data collection, (d) analytical procedures, (e) ethics, and (f) the role of the researcher. It will conclude with the potential contributions of the research to the scholarly literature and father support and education practices.

Research Design

Participants and sampling strategy.

I chose participants for this study from a group of 295 fathers who had taken the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshop through the community education department of a hospital in one of the larger cities in Oregon. This particular *Boot Camp for New Dads*® program was launched in November 2002 and has continued to the present day on a bi-monthly basis. In order

to focus on the long term process of developing fatherhood of these men, I excluded participants whose first child was an infant or toddler at the time of the study from this cluster of participants.

I selected study participants through a random sampling strategy. The sampling began with the collection of the contact information of the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® participants into a spreadsheet. From this spreadsheet I selected potential participants using a Table of Random Digits (De Veaus, Velleman, & Bock, 2009). I contacted the fathers generated by this random sampling (see Appendix A) by telephone and asked them to participate in this research, emphasizing the personal interviews aspect. It was anticipated that a third or more of the participants who volunteered for the study, would have also returned to help with a *Boot Camp for New Dads*® class as a veteran dad. Only one of the study participants had served as a veteran dad. I concluded the interviews at data saturation, when a majority of the responses from participants were expressed by earlier participants. This data saturation level was met at fourteen interviewees.

Data collection and analytical procedures.

Qualitative data were gathered by personal interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix B). Ten of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. I conducted three of the interviews over the telephone: two due to personal preferences of the interviewees and one due to the interviewee having moved out of the area. One interview was conducted at a restaurant. The personal interviews lasted between 25 and 55 minutes and were recorded digitally. Within ten days after the completion of the interviews I transcribed the digital recordings. I also compiled interview notes during the interview and included observations of the interview setting and participants. I constructed field notes, which are an immediate

reflection on the interview just conducted, shortly after the interviews. For the interviews conducted in the interviewee's home I constructed field notes in my car after driving a few blocks away from the homes, at the conclusion of the interviews. In addition, I kept a field journal during the personal interview phase of the study. The field journal enabled the recording of my initial reflections on the interviews and interview process in advance of the transcription of the recorded interview data.

The methodology of this study was qualitative exploratory research. This type of research seeks to find common themes and consistent meaning for a group through how they have experienced a concept or occurrence (Creswell, 2013). In this qualitative research, the common element for each participant was the experience of the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® curriculum that was presented with fidelity, meaning the class coaches were strongly encouraged by the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® organization to make sure the entire curriculum was presented at each workshop session (see Appendix C).

Following the transcription process, I coded the information. In qualitative research, coding occurs when the interview data are labeled and gathered into small categories of information (Creswell, 2013). I used open coding to code the data into principle groups of information. The open coding was achieved by first grouping the transcribed responses from each interviewee into categories headed by the interview questions (see Appendix D). I initially determined the codes for the transcribed interview responses from the responses elicited during the first interview. The range of initial codes for each interview question was between two and six codes. As I continued the open coding and read more diverse responses, I constructed and applied additional codes. By the time I coded the last few transcriptions I only needed to add one or two more codes in order to completely code those final interviews. This reduced need to

add more codes for the final few interview transcriptions confirmed my observation that I had reached data saturation by the fourteenth interview.

From the groups or categories of data labeled in open coding, I employed axial coding. Through axial coding I took the open coded data and gathered and connected the data to common themes and phenomena. Utilizing the interview questions as axial coding categories I gathered all fourteen tables of open-coded responses for a particular question into one document (see Appendix E). Through this method I gathered the open coded data into six (Creswell, 2013) different axial coding categories for further data analysis. From these data categories I subjected the axial coded data to selective coding. Selective coding selects the common themes and phenomena from axial coding and creates propositions concerning the relationships inferred from within the axial coding. I triangulated these coded data with the field notes, the field journal, and observations in order to achieve data validity. Data reliability was achieved through member checking with a subsample of three of the participants, chosen randomly, as well as peer review of the coding process. I analyzed these data for themes concerning the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshops and the process of developing fatherhood.

Ethics

I conducted the study under the guidelines of the George Fox University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I took the six-hour online course, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) human subject research certification, Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE) Module, from the University of Miami. This course was required by the IRB of the local *Boot Camp for New Dads*® sponsoring hospital. In this study I abided by the guidelines and recommendations from this human subjects research certification. Study members were required

to sign an informed consent letter in order to participate in this study (see Appendix F). The informed consent letters have been stored in a locked safe in an undisclosed location and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the dissertation. I used general descriptions and/or pseudonyms in identifying the participants, and any identifying personal information was not included in the dissertation document. The fact that the study members were chosen from a pool of 295 *Boot Camp for New Dads*® participants also contributed to the public anonymity and confidentiality of individual study participants.

I have retained all electronic and hard copy materials generated in this study. Back up files of electronic research materials have been stored on an external hard drive, flash drive, and digital data CDs. To ensure the safety and security of the electronic materials, it has not been and will not be stored on any external sites such as a data cloud or Dropbox®. After three years all digital vocal recordings of the personal interviews will be destroyed.

Role of the Researcher

First and foremost, I am a Doctor of Education student at George Fox University and this research was conducted for the doctoral dissertation phase of this Doctor of Education program. I had the responsibility for conducting the research in an ethical manner, adhering to all guidelines and protocols for appropriate doctoral dissertation research.

The general topic of the support and education of fathers has been an important interest of to me for the past 25 years. In addition, I was personally responsible for the launching of the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® workshops in Salem and Silverton, Oregon, and assisted in the development of these workshops in Corvallis and Eugene, Oregon.

Potential Contributions of the Research

Compared to the extent of scholarly literature concerning parenting, particularly the role of mothers, there is limited literature regarding all phases of the fathering role. This study will have a vital impact on the lack of research concerning fathers, and will provide a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge about the development of the father role.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Introduction

The following questions guided and focused my research: a) What do men learn about being a father and how have they learned it? b) In what ways do fathers perceive their roles in the overall development of their children? c) What additional experiences and events have impacted their role as a father?

As documented in chapter three, I collected qualitative data through personal interviews with fourteen fathers who had taken the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® class before the arrival of their first baby. The program site where these fathers were randomly chosen began conducting this class in 2002. In order to gain insights into the developing father role in men I chose to interview fathers whose first child was beyond the infant/toddler stage. This meant that the set of 295 fathers from which I randomly selected names were from classes held from 2002 through 2012, and excluded classes from 2013 and 2014.

The fathers were selected using a Table of Random Digits (De Veaus, Velleman, & Bock, 2009). I selected eight names at a time in a set and called each father on the telephone. If I was able to speak to the father, I asked each one if they would be interested in participating in the study, using a script approved by the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® sponsoring hospital's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). Following a seven to ten day period of calling, leaving messages, and keeping phone records, I selected another set of names using the same random sampling methods. Fathers were not recruited into the study for three basic reasons: a) their phone numbers were no longer accurate, b) they were contacted but not

interested in participating , or c) I left messages on three occasions without success and moved on to the next name in the spreadsheet. I attempted to contact 75 fathers, which was 25.4% of the initial set of 295 names, before I finished the recruitment of the interviewees at fourteen participants.

Eleven of the interviews were conducted in person, ten in their homes, and one at a restaurant; the other three were conducted over the phone. The format for the in person interviews was to begin by thanking the father for his participation. Next, the interviewee signed the letter of consent (see Appendix F) and completed a demographics form (see Appendix G). An Olympus Digital Voice Recorder® was activated to record the interview. I used an interview protocol to conduct the interview (see Appendix B), which was approved by the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® local sponsoring hospital's IRB. While I conducted the interview I wrote observation notes on the interview protocol.

When the in person interviews concluded, I thanked the fathers for their participation. After leaving the home, or in one case the restaurant, I got into my vehicle, drove a few blocks away, stopped the vehicle, and wrote down field notes of my immediate impressions of the interview. Once I arrived at home, I transferred the MP3 file from the Olympus Digital Voice Recorder® into a folder on my personal laptop computer. I began transcription of the interview within one week of the conclusion of each interview. The three interviews conducted over the phone were conducted in the same manner except that I waited until I received a copy of the signed letter of consent in the mail before setting up and conducting the interview. Also, for these three interviews I wrote the field notes at my desk at home immediately after the conclusion of the interviews.

After the completion of all of the interviews and the transcriptions I open coded each transcript (Creswell, 2013), organizing the coding process by each of the six interview questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix D). Before axial coding the open-coded data I randomly chose three of the interviewees for member checking. I contacted them by telephone and read back to them transcribed excerpts from the interview for accuracy of content and verification of the code I applied to their responses. Subsequent to the member checking I changed the code for one of the interview responses, which confirmed both the accuracy of the transcription and codes applied.

Also, before axial coding the data I triangulated the open-coded data with data from my interview notes, field notes, and field journal. I did not have access to any artifacts from either the fathers' participation in *Boot Camp for New Dads*® or from their current role as a father, so triangulation of the study data with these kinds of data was not possible.

The axial coding (Creswell, 2013) process I employed was to organize the open-coded data into six sets according to the six interview questions. Each set had fourteen tables of open-coded data that I could count and analyze, and upon which I could make comments. After completing the axial coding I applied selective coding in order to create themes and theoretical constructs that could be related to a priori themes as well as to generate new propositions for the field. I enlisted two colleagues not associated with the study *Boot Camp for New Dads*® program or with George Fox University to conduct a peer review of the coding process. Their insights provided valuable information for refining the coding process.

Results

I gathered a limited amount of descriptive demographic data about each interviewee. Thirteen of the fathers were married to the mothers of their children, and one father was not married to his child's mother and had maintained a separate household from the time of his child's birth. Twelve of the fathers were White, one was African-American, and one was Latino. The mean number of children for each father was 1.86, with the mode and median both at 2 children. Since the demographics form asked for ranges of income responses, the mean of \$61,964 is a rough estimate of their average household income. The mode and median for the household income response was the \$60,001 to \$75,000 category. The mean class attendance year was 2007, with the modes being both 2008 and 2012, and the median being between 2008 and 2009 (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Descriptive Data for Interviewees

Data	N	Mean	Mode	Median	Low	High
Number of children	14	1.86	2	2	1	3
Family Income	14	\$61, 964	\$67,500	\$67,500	\$45,000	\$85,000
Class year	14	2007.9	2008, 2012	2008-2009	2003	2012

The opening question was: How do you perceive your role as a father? The responses to this question, as well as with most of the other questions, usually entailed multiple codes.

Regarding this question, the most frequent response was the father saw himself in the role of teacher. One father responded in this way:

Try to teach them you know some core values at a (sic) early age. Clean up behind yourself. Save money. Treat people with respect. Clean up after yourselves. Some of the basics that kind of go, you know, go with basic parenting nowadays.

Another father saw himself as a teacher of social skills for his children, “I work hard to teach my children how to communicate with others and how to express their feelings and talk about it—try to find alternative ways to settle the school yard battle.” A third father combined the role of teacher with the role of playmate, “Dad nurtures but I think children naturally look to Dad for more playing and more learning as far as kind of the world maybe.” Learning how to communicate was emphasized by a father, “Encourage them to try new things. I work hard to teach my children how to communicate with others and how to express their feelings and talk about it—try to find alternative ways to settle the schoolyard battle.”

The role of teacher could also entail “hands-on” learning. This is how one of the fathers talked about it:

Showin’ them like what I do. Hands-on fixing things or letting them, showing them one time and letting them learn three or four times. Kind of showing them how by doing something else they could have gotten to the results quicker, or with less injury, or less stress type of stuff.

The next most frequent response was the role of protector. One father used an image of an animal in describing his protector role, “I mean it’s being the protector you know, like the daddy bear. I see myself as the daddy bear. Protecting them, watching out for dangers, just providing for them.”

A father connected his work experience to his role as protector in this way:

Well, it's a role I take very seriously. I believe dudes who, my, the work, the type of work that I do and have done for the past two decades, I take I very seriously due to just being exposed to a lot of the potential dangers out there in society. I work in the mental health field and a lot of the trauma I see on a daily basis, that a lot of my clients are, have been exposed to. Having been a former employee of the juvenile department and seeing a lot of the crimes the younger population has been involved in, and once again seeing a lot of the trauma they've been exposed to, being victimized. I'm very cautious.

Protective. But I try not to be overprotective. Um, I realize that, you know, my children only have to go through childhood once.

Another father simply said, "To provide a home that's safe." Many of the sentiments of the fathers were summed up by this response: "You know, whenever my children are scared they ask for me."

Some of the fathers saw themselves in the role of nurturer; as one father declared, "Naturally doing whatever needs to be done, taking care of the children. You know everything from when they're babies to diapers to bath time to playing to teaching." One father described his nurturer role in terms of his partnership with his wife:

In the long run I try to do as much as I can. Right now we share putting her down to sleep different nights, being there different nights. Sometimes I'll cook, sometimes my wife will cook. We try to do kind of a 50-50 what we can in the parenting.

A father could fulfill the role of nurturer all on his own. A father described it like this: Got two boys, so if I'm not at work I'm with them so it's a definitely a full time job. I don't know what else you need from me. Uh, basically I get off early so I pick them up

from my in-law's and I take care of them until mom gets home. So we do dinner—our own family deal. Responsible for everything so far as you know, feeding them, getting their diapers changed. I'm down to only one that's actually in diapers anymore.

Other roles named by the fathers were role model, teammate with mom, disciplinarian, provider, and father first. The father first code meant the fathers saw their primary role in life as a father, before thinking of anything else such as husband, son, how they were employed, or their leisure pursuits. As in some of the other codes in the six question categories, father first appeared frequently throughout the interviews. The concept of repeated responses appearing at multiple questions will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The next question was: What have you learned as a father and how have you learned it? The interviewees most often indicated that their own father or father-in-law had been a significant source of what they had learned about being a father. Responses included:

I've learned a lot through of course my own upbringing. My father's gone—he has been for some time. You know I had fourteen years with him so, you know knowingly I learned a lot from him. My father-in-law. He's taught me a lot of things.

As well as:

I think it had a lot to do with how I was raised. I have a pretty good relationship with my father. I was raised on a farm so I was with my dad pretty much at all hours of the day.

Or:

There's a lot about what a father could or should do from my own father. And I think that certainly plays into a lot of the decisions the frustrating times with our kids. We'll

talk about how our father's handled situations like that, at least how we remembered them handling them.

A particular father told the story from his childhood that served as a model for how he learned to be a father from his own father:

I think that's one thing I learned from my father, although I lost my father at an early age—at the age of nine. One of my fondest memories is I remember Halloween, he drove me all, it seems like he drove me the entire state and I had a huge bag of candy. It was just he and I and I remember we were in his yellow Chevy pickup and I remember him telling me how much, he was expressing to me how much he loved me. And I kind of like was, at that age I was kind of like, "OK. " But I remember it like it was yesterday, and I get it now why he was saying it. And as I look at my son sometimes I like, "Wow. OK. That's why he was telling me." You're looking at a smaller version of yourself. And losing my dad at the age of nine, I keep that in mind cause every day I think, if I don't make it home for some reason, my kids are gonna know one thing, they gonna know, wow dad loves me because he always says it.

Having a father who was a "poor role model" could influence a father to do better, as this father explained it:

This is an interesting comment. You might find interesting. I think I had a very poor role model growing up, in my dad. I patterned myself to do just about the direct opposite of what he did. So, I didn't want to screw up my kids. I wanted to be there for them. I wanted to be involved in their lives.

They also learned how to be a good father from friends, associates at work and other acquaintances in the community. One father said:

The man I work for-owns the business I work at-he has two grown children. So of course I learned some from him. Some friends had kids earlier than me so I kind of learned some things from them.

Another declared:

My peers. I'm a deacon in my church so I've grown rather close to a lot of the men there at my church, and a lot of the elders, including our pastor. I pick their brains sometimes. I say, "How do you do this?" You know I just get as much input as I possibly can from men I look up to.

Another important concept the interviewees learned was how to be a father first, which was a coded response in the first question. These were profound responses such as: "I learned that it's not all about me anymore. I've learned that not everyone in this world is like me, through various reactions to different things." And:

I learned about my selfishness for me and that you know I really realized how selfish I was for anything I did was for myself basically or my wife when I met my wife. But when you have children you just, you learn how selfless you need to be to be part of life for them.

The role of being father first was learned by a father through being mentored by another father:

My wife and I sort of made friends and were mentored by a family up in Seattle where we lived before coming down here. And they had four kids at the time. And we would

go. When they got pregnant with their fifth, and then again with their sixth, we would go over and babysit for them and let them go out on dates or planning meetings and stuff. So we went over every other week and took care of their four kids and a year and a half later, two years later there are five kids and we got to work out all the kinks. Drop their kids and you know and mess up all of our parenting stuff on their children.

It is in this question where I first heard the fathers talk about learning patience. Patience was another coded response that appeared in answers to multiple interview questions. As one father expounded, “I think my patience although has risen. I’m much more patient than I used to be. Young kids do that to you I think.” Another of the fathers described learning patience in this manner:

And I’m learning patience. And that’s the biggest thing that I’m learning as a father is patience, ‘cause you can’t always do everything for them. They’re gonna screw up. They’re gonna make mistakes. And they’re gonna get it right eventually.

Some of the fathers described learning from tangible resources such as books, the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® class, and other parenting classes. Other responses centered on relationships other than their own father or his friends, but included teaming with their wives, being affectionate with their children, teaching their children, and learning through their experiences with their children as they developed and matured.

The first two interview questions were highly aligned with two of the research questions: What do men learn about being a father and how have they learned it? and, In what ways do fathers perceive their roles in the overall development of their children? The third interview question was: What past experiences impacted your role as a father, either positively or

negatively? It began to address the remaining research question: What additional experiences and events have impacted their role as a father?

In response to this interview question almost all of the fathers had something to say about their own family growing up. Most of these responses were positive, such as: “I was really lucky. I have a good set of parents. If I could be just like my dad, that’s what I’d be. That’s what I’d be.” Another father said, “Well, big experience starting with my childhood, my parents were always there. Sporting events, school events, they were always there; so I knew that was something I wanted to show my kids—that we’re always there.” Some of the experiences were negative, including: “My dad and mom separating when I was 11. My dad was really kind of absent after that.”

A different father responded:

I don’t ever remember having any kind of in-depth conversation with my dad or anything like that, or any kind of connection that way other than working on cars in the shop. Kind of one of the things I want to do with my kids, I want to be able to say, Hey, I want them to be able to remember me being involved in their life.

A father told this story of how his father worked very hard to balance his work and family life:

I’d say, you know, watching my dad be really dedicated to being a good role model, making good choices. When I was a young kid my mom basically raised us while dad went through grad school. So, we lived in Texas. I think right about the time I was born dad had finished his masters, and when we lived in Texas he was going for his doctorate. So he would work all day and then be in night classes for years. And we moved up to

Washington and a bunch of his credits didn't transfer and he ended up getting a second masters. But I saw him being really dedicated to wanting to get our family set up. Uh, watching him being really dedicated to furthering education and those things. And then when we moved up and he wasn't able to finish out his doctorate, he had a bunch more time. He only had a couple classes to take. So once that was finished he was able to spend a lot more time at home and he did. So that was really good.

This father described the stability of his family life as a child:

So I think also with my upbringing with my mom and dad was a big part of that cause there was always schedule, you know, a schedule of events. We had dinner at the table every night with the family and we talked about the day. It wasn't a, you know, you didn't come to the table and whine and cry and talk about bad things. It was always about good things, about your day. And you know my upbringing was with my parents, was a big, big help in that also.

A surprising set of responses centered on the topic of forgiveness, including being able to apologize to their children. One father described it this way:

And there's nights that they push me past my limits and I raise my voice and they cry. I always feel horrible and I always make sure I go in and apologize to them and then sit down and talk to them face to face and say, "This is why I got upset. This is what I see from my point of view. Now tell me what you were thinking. And if I'm wrong I apologize." That opened my eyes when that happened. That's a huge influence.

Another father learned about forgiveness through the example set by a mentor:

I think the biggest thing I learned from S was when you are wrong, apologize. I saw him a number of times apologize to his kids. Cause he'd snap at them and 15 minutes later realize, "I shouldn't have said that or all that stuff." And actually take the high road and say, "Hey, I'm sorry. I was wrong." So that was really helpful to go, you know, that I'm going to be wrong at times.

A few of the fathers talked about the fact that during their childhood their father or an extended family member family died. This helped them resolve to be there for their own children. One father described losing his father at an early age:

Well with my dad passing away when I was fourteen, I learned real quick and I tried putting that into myself being a father. And, um, you don't know how much time you have so, you know, try to tell them you love them every day. And you make sure you do something with them every day—don't ignore them.

A different father talked about the how losing his uncle in tragic circumstances influenced his resolve to be a good father:

And I always looked at my uncle and his relationship with his boys as being phenomenal. He used to give them every last dollar out of their billfold to make sure they had what they needed. And when he was murdered I thought to myself, "What went wrong there?" He was a friend. He was a hardworking man. And he, what I thought, did all the right things. So, I don't know. To me, that changed me to where I guess I want to protect my kids more—be more involved. Be more involved with their life. But even more, be more—I guess hold onto them tighter, you know. I was real afraid of doing something wrong

and screwing up and causing that kind of hate in their life, from a father, and I didn't want that. I don't want that.

The decision to be a father first was talked about as well as learning patience. Here is how a father described his goal of being there for his family above all else:

I want to stay with my family. I want to be there for T whenever I can, my daughter. I see myself as a father first before my career. So I kind of once seeing make a decision I'd rather be with my family than being a Navy officer and being an admiral. I had to choose, retire, being an admiral but you have to spend 90% of my time away from my family. I'll retire and be with my family. So, that was kind of where my decision is. I'd rather be with family than be a highly successful career man.

Witnessing someone trying to be a father without good patience influenced one father to do better:

My step dad's very short temper, yells a lot. I've known, I recall my dad seeing him before my parents separated, and then went away after. I'm very, I try to keep an even keel. I've never really had a temper. And I kind of one thing, all is I keep my cool, throughout the process. I'm very into it. She's only two years old. I kind of maintain being the adult and keep my cool, you know, and what the right way to do is.

Other experiences described were the event of having children, experiencing their wives' positive family dynamics, the *Boot Camp for New Dads*® class, experiences as a childcare worker, and exposure to positive fathering from friends' dads.

The next interview question was designed to focus in on the father role of nurturer or educator: What things do you do to help your children succeed? As I crafted this question I expected a high response rate of the educator role, which indeed was the case with the fathers I interviewed. One father talked about how he deliberately and systematically worked on his daughter's language acquisition:

During our routines I teach her words that she can see. So, when we're changing her diaper I teach her all the words that she can see when she's laying there, or when we're giving her a bottle. She knows most all of the features on a face and she can point to them and say most of them. She knows a lot of body parts. She knows a lot of things around the room. And really I just constantly talk to her and name things. And she's really into that. She responds well to it. So she knows a lot of words.

This next father, along with his wife, figured out what their young daughter was really interested in. He provided her with the learning materials and provided guidance when needed:

She's just getting into puzzles right now, doing the little 6, or 9, 12 piece jig saw puzzles, that she's a big fan-the Mickey Mouse ones. And we both kind of sit with her and in our own way, the first time she looks at the puzzle, so the pieces, "How do you think this one will go someplace?" Something like that, and she's done that she can put the puzzle together on her own.

The educator role in helping their children succeed could be as simple as support and just being there, as this father states:

I try to support her as much as I can. And pursuing what she wants to do. I've got her, for example, at some camps this summer. Last summer she did that. I don't have her

enough to get involved in soccer or lessons or anything like family without her mom buying into it. I've been able to do stuff like day camps that she really enjoys. Trying new things to challenge what she already has. I'm with her school as much as I can. I make a lot of parent-teacher conferences. They usually have them in the evening so I don't get to see what she is doing, as she's going along. But when I can I try to do that and encourage her and you know, set expectations that I expect her to work hard and to do well and that sort of thing.

Another father talked of how he and his wife integrated teaching and learning in everyday activities:

We play a lot of games, and we do have a lot of conversation. Dinner is a main focus for conversation, how your day went. My daughter's in kindergarten now so we make sure that we read to both the kids, just about every night. We do our best to do that every night. Read books. My daughter actually reads back to us now. Um, you know, playing games as you're driving. Who can find the blue car or who sees the first red house? You know, things to expand their learning experience.

A surprising number of fathers answered this question in terms of letting their children experience failure and make mistakes, in order to help them succeed later on. In these responses the fathers wanted their children to learn through experiences that contained a safely managed degree of risk, rather than overprotect them from any risk of harm or other negative experiences. One father had this to say about the subject:

We let her fail, already here and there. If she falls down we can see that it wasn't a hard fall and it didn't hurt her. We tell her, "OK. Get back up and brush yourself off." And

she learned that quick. She does that. We can tell if it really hurt or something, we'd be right there.

A different father talked about it this way:

Another way is to try to get to teach them or have them learn something is just by letting them experience things. Not being there for every single step of their life. Don't climb those stairs 'cause you could fall. Well, you know, you kind of got to set the situation. Are they—is it potentially really super dangerous for them or is it not? If it's not, you know I believe you got to let them get hurt a little bit, so that's one way of teaching them.

A third father had a rather simple system for letting his children learn from their mistakes:

I let them make their own mistakes and I don't um—I don't know how to say that—give them a little bit more carefree about what they're doing, like him right there. Some people might freak out because he's hanging out off the chair eating Cheerios but I figure if he falls off of there he's probably not gonna want to do that again.

Some of the fathers talked about helping their children succeed in terms of the nurturer role. One father said, "... basically just give them the attention they need and, uh, um, nurture their curiosities and, um, not really confine them so much." A second father spoke in terms of nurturing his son's self-help skills:

I'm trying to get him to succeed at going to the bathroom in the toilet. Not a whole lot right not but I could imagine just-and I've seen it a little bit now-just how they watch each, you know, all the time. And they do the things that you do all the time. I think that

would be one of the harder things but also one of the, one of the great things is the, you have to be who you want them to be, all the time.

In response to the question about helping his children succeed, a father responded in terms of encouraging his children to experience his wife's nurturing extended family:

And then the other influence is my wife's family—how much they uh, they bond together. They do everything together. You know when I was growing up we didn't see aunts, uncles that often but with my wife's family we see her uncle all the time. We see her grandparents all the time. We expose our kids to that and it's always—it's not about the way of life, it's about the quality of life with them. And I always thought, "It's not about what you have. It's about how you spend it." And so with that I try and teach my kids, "You're gonna miss these days someday, or you're gonna reflect back and go, God it was a lot of fun." I want them, that's an experience I want them to have. Once I got to know her family—that was an experience that I wanted for my family.

The following question was constructed in a manner to elicit responses in regards to how the interviewees perceived and valued their current roles as fathers: If you could, would there be anything you would go back in time and tell yourself about being a father? I thought this question would elicit deep insights into their current and highly cherished roles as fathers, as well as a way to get them to consider their own growth in fatherhood. In comparison to the other questions, this one seemed more difficult for them to answer. Despite these complications some of the fathers spoke of how challenging fatherhood was and that they would have loved to have known how much they were going to have to learn. Here is an example of how a father handled this question:

So, I think if I had an opportunity to go back and inform myself would be that I'm a dumb ass. I really don't know everything. I mean, I was bull headed. When I was a young parent I was bull headed and wanted to do it my way. I didn't want to do it different and I didn't want to take any advice from anybody. But now as I look back on that it probably wasn't the right thing to do. I probably burnt a lot of bridges doing that too. Inform myself that I know nothing. To take advice and get help, especially at the age of 17, 18.

Another father declared:

And then, you know, it goes back to the selfishness. I didn't realize, you know, how much commitment there was, I don't think, and if I could go back and maybe watch some of other friends who had kids and take note of some of the things they had done. It wouldn't have been as big a shock for me when it became time for us to have kids.

A few of the fathers said that they wouldn't want to have known earlier what they understood now, because they enjoyed the learning process of how to be an involved father. There were some conflicting responses as well. Some of the fathers wished they had started earlier having children, like this dad, "Oh my goodness! Well I think that, I'm almost 43 so I think that I'd go back in time and start a little earlier. I think that would be one thing for sure."

In contrast a couple of others would have loved to have started later than they did. Here is how one father put it:

Um, (long pause) probably wouldn't have hurried into it as fast. I could have waited a few more years and gotten a little bit more settled. That definitely had a little bit of an impact. We bought the house basically the same year we had a kid, my first son. If I

could do it again I probably would have waited a little bit longer and would have been a little bit more stable. Cause it took you know five years to actually be comfortable and making decent money and not to worry about you know health care and all that kind of stuff. That's probably the only thing I would change. Everything else has been hoppin'.

Also, some of the responses were noted in earlier questions concerning being a father first and having more patience. The following is a strong response about patience:

I don't think, not really. I'm not really framed in that sense. I can't think of anything, but I constantly am working on my patience and working on, just working on patience – consciously thinking, “Be patient.” And frankly that's more for our oldest I think who's starting to push limits and question authority and you know be thinking they know everything and got to challenge me.

The final interview question was: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your role as a father? The most common response was how enjoyable being a father was. One father said, “Enjoying their childhood, and growing, and learning, and blossoming. Everything that is good, fun and positive—that's what they deserve.” Here is how another father described enjoying fatherhood:

It's a, enjoyable. It really is enjoyable. Um. Not that it wasn't the first time around. My two daughters—but being an older parent and having a little bit more patience and understanding of what's going on. Now I'm a bit more comfortable in my career; I think it's more enjoyable now than it ever was.

This father talked about enjoying his children now and having some trepidation about what was to come:

Yeah. I love being a father. And these kids are amazing. They are half of my wife and half of me and they're just brilliant and wonderful. I love being a dad. Part of being a teacher is being home a bunch. I can't imagine having another career or what I would do because it takes so much time with them. I don't know. I feel like I'm pretty good at it. I feel confident in how I'm raising my kids. New stages still kind of scare me – the teen years. I'm a little worried.

Some of the fathers responded to the final question with their ideas of being a father first. One of the fathers said, "I think being a father is the greatest thing ever in the world." Another declared, "I love being a father. And these kids are amazing. They are half of my wife and half of me and they're just brilliant and wonderful. I love being a dad."

I was particularly impressed with how the following father talked in detail about how he saw himself as a father first and how pleased he was with being a father:

It's the best decision I ever did, other than getting married. And I tell my kids they're my biggest frustration in my life, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I love having my kids. No matter how frustrated I get with them sometimes it's just I couldn't imagine life without my kids. Especially to wake up with them jumping into bed, or chasing the dog around, or listening to them even fight sometimes, it's just like, that sounds like what my brother and I used to do all the time. And you get that chuckle and yeah, it's a good experience. And I never have them figured out. Just about the time I think I'm catching on to what I need to be doing at this time in their lives, they're at the next level and I'm always playing catch up.

Patience was again spoken of by one father as he talked about how he wanted to patiently impart some life lessons to his children:

There's a great sticker one of my co-workers has on their cubicle's – Courage is not, sometimes courage is saying I will try again tomorrow, or something like that, to that nature. And I go, oh yeah, that's awesome. You don't have to be the greatest. You don't have to be number one. But you do have to try your hardest. I just pray that, you know, before I die that they get that and that when I do die they put me away knowing, saying things like, "Hey, dad was, he was the best damn father ever, and I want to be like him when I grow up. Or I want to be even better." And um, that will make me happy. I'm sorry, I'm probably babbling. I love talking about being a father to my kids.

Several dads talked about teaming with their wives. This father talked about teamwork, even before his baby was born:

That fits with some stuff we said in class—I don't know if any of the guys cover it, I do – that you have to have a good communication system with your wife before the baby comes because you're going to have to make a lot of decisions after you already have a good track record of making good decisions together. That's the most important thing than the plan's actually working you think is going to happen. You have to be able to work it out.

All of the fathers interviewed provided thoughtful and heartfelt responses to the interview questions. They were engaged in the interviews and were invested in sharing with me the details of their journey as a father. Even though the last few interviews reached data saturation, those interviews were as rich with important insights into the role of the father as the first interviews.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications for Future Study

Discussion

The interviewees in this study described a full and rich life as fathers, fulfilling many important roles in the lives of their children. They saw themselves as teachers, protectors, nurturers, role models, teammates with the mother, disciplinarian, and provider. Baumrind (1971) presents authoritative parenting as the most desirable parenting style. When the fathers spoke of being teachers, protectors, nurturers, and role models, they were aligning themselves more often with the preferred authoritative parenting style that exemplifies high warmth and positive control, as compared with the other parenting styles. Combining their responses about the role of protector with these other responses provides a picture of fatherhood similar to the role of fathers during the first 200 years of American history (Pleck, 1987).

The fathers in this study repeatedly discussed how the overriding role and ethic in their lives was highly valuing their responsibilities of being a good father. It is difficult for a child to attach to a caregiver without the caregiver also being bonded to that child (Bowlby, 1988). Being an active and involved father can be seen as a manifestation of parental bonding. It would be difficult to conceive of a father thinking that fathering is his primary job in life if he was not bonded to his children.

In regards to the first research question, What do men learn about being a father and how have they learned it?, the most common source of learning how to be a good father was from their relationship with another father who modeled good parenting practices. Many of the fathers spoke of their own fathers as being a primary source of this good modeling, but they also

talked about fathers-in-law, friends, and work associates as being good role models for them. Being a father first was also something the fathers spoke of learning.

Rather than mentioning classes or books, the interviewees most commonly saw their experiences with their own family as having a strong influence on how they have developed their role as a father. A significant emotional experience could also have a strong impact on the development of their father role. Such emotional experiences could be an everyday interaction with their children where the fathers needed to be able to apologize to their children. It could also be a more traumatic experience like the death of their own father during their childhood. They also saw value in the experience of having their children, the *Boot Camp for Dads*® class, and being a childcare worker.

The fathers I interviewed saw themselves as educators and guides in helping their children succeed. Not only did they engage in direct and indirect teaching of their children, but they also saw themselves as having the responsibility of safely letting their children learn how to succeed, and letting them fail and make mistakes. These roles of educator and guide fit well with the concept of generativity caring for the next generation (Brotherson and White, 2007).

These fathers did not have many regrets about how their role as a father has developed, so far. A few spoke of wishing they would have been a more open learner in their children's early years, but others enjoyed the journey of fatherhood, mistakes and all.

Across the three research questions and the six interview questions there were five major themes concerning the development of the fathering role that emerged from the responses of the fathers interviewed. The first theme was that the primary role in which the fathers saw themselves was as an engaged father (Pleck, Lamb, & Levine, 1985) who was actively involved in their children's lives as an educator, nurturer, guide, and protector. The theme of the engaged

father aligns quite well with the current fourth historical era of fathering-the era of the nurturing father (Pleck, 1987, Pleck & Pleck, 2007). The fathers talked about these roles not only in terms of how they perceived their general role as father, but also as the means to how they help their children succeed. The role of educator, nurturer, or guide evinces the first segment of positive father involvement, through the direct engagement of the fathers with their children (Pleck, Lamb, and Levine, 1985). One father summed it up this way. “And encouraging her to push her activities harder and that sort of thing. Being there along with her life and, you know, guide her along her way, as much as I can.”

The second theme was that many of the interviewees saw themselves as fathers first, ahead of what they did for a living, and even preempting other family roles such as son, brother or husband. They talked about this idea in response to five of the six interview questions. This self-concept of being primarily a father is a life lesson not easily nor automatically learned by parents, but was something about which almost all of the fathers in this study expressed strong, positive opinions. It is highly related to the attachment/bonding relationship with their children (Bowlby, 1988). This theme contains all of the elements in the definition of father involvement-engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Pleck, Lamb, & Levine, 1985). This life-changing decision was articulated by a father this way:

Oh, you know, I never thought four or five years ago that I would ever be the guy with the minivan, carrying two bags and a diaper bag down to the beach, but it turns out that that's what it is and it took a little bit of getting used to. The freedom, they're not necessarily the freedoms that you give up but, you know, the responsibilities you take on to raise young kids.

The third theme indicated by the data was that of learning how to be patient, including being able to apologize to their children. In four out of the six questions, patience was one or more of the responses from the participants. Patience can be an important component of the attachment/bonding relationship with a child. In social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) it is also an essential quality of the parent-child relationship (O'Connor & Scott, 2007). The fathers talked about patience in response to many of the questions. Learning about patience was the one specific item they talked about in regards to their participation in *Boot Camp for New Dads*®. They felt the class segment on shaken baby syndrome not only helped them avoid the tragic mistake of harming their baby, but also prepared them to be more patient with their child. Here is how one father put it:

Yes, there was one thing that, I think that there was the number one thing that was stressed. And that was when you have your baby—actually two things—when you have your baby and you're really frustrated, don't shake that baby, and hold him close. And that's one thing that I took home and I said, "OK. That's definitely something that's important because I can see when you're holding out a baby the force on him would be much greater when he's further away as opposed to when you're holding him close. And I totally understand how parents, how easily the tempers, the lack of sleep. I see incidents of shaken baby and, you know, it just breaks my heart. But it happens. I actually, I can see from a parent's perspective, gosh, it's so hard, and it's so easy to do something you totally don't mean to do. And it's just screws up a little child's life for their whole life. I mean, it's hard, and it's so easy to do.

The fourth theme that emerged was how the men learned fathering skills from their relationships with other adults. This was primarily from their own fathers, but also from fathers-

in-law, wives, extended family, friends, and co-workers. As compared to women, men in American culture are seen as more independent-minded and less socially competent, but the men I interviewed indicated that they were relationship-focused, learning valuable fathering skills from their interactions with many important people in their lives. Even though they identified other means of learning how to be a father, such as classes and books, it was noteworthy that this idea of learning through relationships appeared to be very important to these fathers. An interviewee talked of learning from his own father when he said, “I learned how to be a father from my dad. I have a great father. I learned also what I didn’t want to do from my father.”

The fifth and final theme summarized from the data was how many of the fathers allowed their children to learn from their mistakes in order to help them succeed in life. This concept lands solidly in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), when the fathers provide a safe environment for their children in order to encourage them to risk failure and learn from their mistakes. Sometimes this idea is something fathers encourage apart from the agendas of the mothers, but sometimes it is something on which both parents agree. This kind of partnership was eloquently explained by this father:

We allow them to make a lot of mistakes on their own sometimes, but it depends on what the circumstances are. Yeah, don’t do that and then they turn around and do it. We don’t stop them, let them do something, not something to where they get badly hurt or anything like that. But, “Hey don’t touch that pan, it’s hot. It just came out of the oven.” And they walk right over and, “Don’t touch that, it’s hot. If you want to burn yourself.” We’ll let them. If they get close—everyone gets burn and stuff. We don’t intentionally hurt them but we give them certain parameters and, hey, it’s kind of an extreme way but it’s more of a kind of a, hey, it’s learning. You learn some things. We don’t let them get

hurt bad or anything. We let them experience things, learn things alone. Take them to the park—we let them kind of kind of climb on the monkey bars. If they're scared or frightened I try to encourage them the best we can. We don't force them till they're scared.

The strength of each of the five themes, in comparison to the others, can be judged by several means. If the importance of a theme is to be determined by the number of responses it represented within a given question, then the theme of the engaged father would rise to the top of the list. If a given theme is significant, judging by how many times it appeared in different questions, the father first and patience themes would be first and second. Cases could be made with any number of reasons, why one theme is more important than the other. From the passion, earnestness, and clarity of the responses from the fathers I interviewed, I would have to say that all five themes are all equally important.

Conclusions

The fourteen men I interviewed talked about their role and life as a father in terms of being very involved fathers. In thinking of themselves as fathers first they were engaged, accessible and responsible fathers (Pleck, Lamb, & Levine, 1985). Their engagement with their children included the roles of educator, nurturer, guide, and protector. It also included being patient with their children and allowing their children to learn from their mistakes. These fathers learned how to be good fathers from their relationships with other adults, especially using their own fathers as models from which to learn.

A review of the literature indicated that positive father involvement can produce positive learning and life outcomes for their children. This qualitative, interview-based study revealed

that the fathers I talked to were positively involved with their children with the potential of confidently affecting the learning and life outcomes for those children.

The themes identified through the qualitative research process provided significant answers to the three research questions. The first research question was, “What do men learn about being a father and how have they learned it?” The data indicated that men learn about being a father first, and how to be patient with their children. They learned these things through relationships with other adults, most commonly from their own fathers.

The second research question was, “In what ways do fathers perceive their roles in the overall development of their children?” The fathers primarily saw themselves as educators, guides, or nurturers and, to a lesser extent, protectors of their children. Thinking of themselves as fathers first was also an important way they perceived their roles with their children.

The final research question was, “What additional experiences and events have impacted their role as a father?” One answer was the theme where the fathers allowed the children to take risks and make mistakes in order to learn from those mistakes. Another answer was their experience with the shaken baby syndrome class segment that led to them being more patient with their children.

The five identified themes lend themselves to the generation of several theories. The first theory is fathers today can be engaged and active participants in the parenting of their children. The roles identified in the first theme, as well as the father first theme, the patience theme, and the theme where the fathers encouraged their children to learn from their mistakes, all depict fathers who are actively and positively involved with their children. Utilizing this theory, professionals who work with fathers should start with an asset model in their approach, meaning

they should interact with fathers under the assumption that they are or desire to be active and involved fathers.

A second theory generated from the five themes is men develop their role as a father first from their experiences, or lack of positive experiences, with their own father. In addition, they learn about being a father from other relationships as well as educational sources such as books and classes. In the field of father studies this theory points to approaches to support and educate fathers that provide strong consideration of the intergenerational aspect of the development of the fathering role in men.

Besides these results, there were several important lessons I learned from this research. One important lesson I learned was to trust the random selection process. In designing this study, I was concerned that I would not get enough variation in the men I interviewed. Because of the passage of time from when the men took the class to the initiation of the study, I feared too many of the phone numbers would be unusable, skewing the interviews towards more recent class participants. Since the overwhelming majority of the 295 participants I had in my spreadsheet were white I also feared that I would not get a representative diversity of fathers. My dissertation committee encouraged me to put these fears aside and trust the random selection process. The result was that I did, indeed, get a good sampling of fathers from all of the years of classes in the study, including two fathers of color. The random selection process produced other diverse aspects of some of the fathers, such as having a separate household, having a new baby late in life, or the status of being a stay-at-home father.

Another valuable lesson was participating in, and learning from, the qualitative interview process. The dissertation committee was again very helpful in allaying my fears that I would need to interview quite a few fathers in order to produce enough meaningful data for this study.

Their predictions that I would only need ten or twelve interviews in order to reach data saturation seemed too low, but I went ahead with the study with this target in mind. The committee was correct. I ended the interview process at fourteen individuals, when it felt like 80 per cent of what I was hearing was similar to interview responses I had heard before. Culminating at fourteen interviews was confirmed in the coding process. By the time I open coded the last few interviews, and as I was using codes from the previously coded interviews, I had to create only two or three new codes to finish the process with the last of the transcribed interviews. Both of these data saturation phenomena confirmed the prediction of the dissertation committee of how many fathers I would need to interview.

Through the research process I learned how to conduct qualitative research. In my current position as a state-level education specialist I have been using the research skills I gained through my dissertation study. In my work I have conducted several qualitative survey projects that have included coding and summarizing responses to specific questions. I have conducted a literature review for an important statewide project with which I am involved. I anticipate that I will continue to apply this valuable research expertise in my future work in state-level education.

One thing I would have done differently was to test my interview questions before proceeding with the full interview process. In retrospect, the question about the interviewees going back in time and telling themselves something about fathering could have been eliminated with no significant loss of data. The fathers seemed to have difficulty understanding this question, let alone providing heart-felt responses. Other than refining the interview questions, there would be little else I would change about how I conducted the research. The dissertation proposal process unfolded wonderfully and systematically. The hospital IRB requested I take the online human subjects research course and, even though this request entailed time and energy, I

felt the resulting knowledge and skills was well worth the effort. When I began to conduct the research, the sampling, interviewing, transcribing, and coding process went so smoothly it is difficult to conceive how it could have gone any better.

Embedded in some of the responses to the interview questions were glimpses into the relationship the fathers had with their wives, and in one case the mother with whom he shared custody of his daughter. Also, as I concluded the interviews it occurred to me I had not asked any questions concerning how the fathers envisioned their futures with their children.

Finally, this research further established the significance of the Conceptual Framework of the School of Education (Think Critically, Transform Practice, and Promote Justice) and the three Key Dispositions of George Fox University (Integrity, Seeking Multiple Perspectives, and Commitment to Courage). I found it impossible to conduct excellent qualitative research without thinking critically and acting with integrity every step of the way—from the study design, to being open to what the literature reveals, to conducting the interviews and coding of the data without preconceived notions, to developing themes, recommendations, and conceptualizing implications from the data that was gathered. This research has transformed my practice as an education specialist as I apply new research skills to my work. It has also transformed how I consider the connections between student achievement and the impact of positive father involvement. In education and social services, fathers are frequently overlooked as an essential and positive influence on their children (Brotherson & White, 2007). Justice will be promoted as this research is added to the body of knowledge that supports and encourages positive father involvement with their children. Through this research I grew in my engagement of multiple perspectives as I talked with fathers of color, older fathers, a stay-at-home dad, and a single-household father. I saw how there were multiple ways for fathers to be positively involved with

their children. It took a commitment to courage to go ask the fathers to participate in the study, to go into their homes, and to interview them.

Recommendations

As indicated earlier, I felt some evaluation of my interview questions would have improved their effectiveness. In response to the question about going back in time to tell themselves something about being a father, many of the fathers indicated they enjoyed the journey and would not change a thing. I feel the same way about the entire research process. I cannot conceive of any significant changes I would make if I could go back and start over with how I developed the dissertation proposal, as well as how I conducted the research.

As an employee of the Oregon Department of Education, and as an Oregon educator in general, I fully support the governor's 40-40-20 agenda as explained in Chapter 1. There are multiple initiatives underway in the state that will help students, teachers, parents, and families achieve the goal of everyone graduating from high school. Compared to the student and teacher focus of these initiatives, there is very little emphasis on supporting parents to be better educators of their children. Within what is aimed at parents, fathers are hardly mentioned at all.

This research supports the important role fathers play in the positive development of their children. It also brings into focus how fathers are positively involved with their children and how they are invested in how their children grow and learn. Political leaders of every persuasion are concerned about "return on investment" when state and local governments spend money on programs for children. I would propose that the "return on investment" in positive father involvement for the state of Oregon, and for the entire United States, would be strong and measurable.

Another recommendation I would make as a result of this study would be to include father involvement as a particular curriculum component in higher education. This would include training of elementary, preschool, and special education teachers as well as training for school administrators. It would also be an important part of training for anyone in social services.

Finally, I would recommend that hospitals and other community organizations concerned with the health and well-being of children and families seriously consider sponsoring a prenatal support and education program for fathers.

Implications for Future Study

The outcomes of this research point to several important avenues for further inquiry. One direction would be to replicate this research with other sets of fathers from *Boot Camp for New Dads*® programs. It would be interesting to see if other studies would produce similar results. For instance, would another set of interviewees talk about helping their children succeed by letting them risk failure?

Another direction of inquiry would be to include the mothers of the children in separate interviews to determine what role their views on parenting could potentially have on the understandings of the fathers. Some of the questions in this study that would include the mothers could be; How much of what the fathers revealed were their ideas and how much was highly influenced with their partnerships with the mothers? or, Who was the leader of the family and how did that leadership affect the responses I heard?

The fathers identified the class segment on shaken baby syndrome as being important to their development of their fathering role, including becoming more patient with their children. The significance of the shaken baby syndrome class segment generates new research questions

not answered by this study. Does *Boot Camp for New Dads*® decrease the rate of shaken baby syndrome and child abuse in communities where the classes are conducted? Entire cohorts of men who enrolled in the class could be examined to find if they are less likely to be involved in child abuse.

A current trend in the education of young children is to support nonacademic skills that will help children be more receptive to literacy and math instruction in the primary grades. These skills have been called executive function (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007) or learning related skills (McClelland, Acock & Morrison, 2006). Embedded within the terms that are used to describe these nonacademic skills are important subcomponents. Two of the subcomponents are showing initiative and taking risks. Further research should be conducted to determine if the activity of fathers encouraging their children to take risks and experience failure has an effect on whether their children have better initiative and risk-taking skills in school, and subsequent higher academic performance.

Finally, further research could be conducted on how *Boot Camp for New Dads*® alumni who see themselves as fathers first support and involve themselves with their children. Specifically, do the men who see themselves as fathers first invest more of their time and energy in positive activities with their children, and do those children achieve better outcomes in school and in life? Positive relationships between fathers and their children are important on their own and are something to celebrate. If early engagement with new fathers helps with positive father involvement, and that positive involvement helps children grow and learn in valuable ways, we will have a pathway for schools, agencies, non-profits, and families to follow that will help children and families succeed in life.

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Appendices

Templates of Instruments Used

Appendix A.

Study Telephone Recruitment Script

1. Hello _____. My name is Bruce Sheppard and I coordinate the instruction of the Boot Camp for New Dads classes at Salem Hospital. I am calling to recruit you into a study I am conducting with a sampling of the fathers who participated in one of the Boot Camp for New Dads sessions at Salem Hospital from 2002 through 2012.
2. This study will be part of the research for my doctor of education dissertation at George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon. If you agree to participate I would come to your home and conduct a 30 to 60 minute interview. This interview would be digitally recorded and transcribed for my dissertation. You would be completely anonymous and any personally identifiable information would not be released to the public.
3. Besides the interview, you would be asked to sign a consent form and fill out a short demographics form.
4. Information from this interview would be stored securely and destroyed after three years. Besides using information from the interview for my doctoral dissertation, this information may also be used for journal articles and/or conference presentations.
5. It is anticipated this research will benefit the body of knowledge in the education and health fields concerning how men develop their roles as fathers.
6. Do you have any questions?
7. Are you interested in participating?
8. (If the answer is No) Thanks for your time and have a good evening.

9. (If the answer is Yes) Great. I can come to your home just about any time during the evening or on weekends. Could I have your address? See you then.

Appendix B.**Interview Protocol:**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewee:

Questions:

1. How do you perceive your role as a father?
2. What have you learned about being a father and how did you learn it?
3. What past experiences have impacted your role as a father, either positively or negatively?
4. What things do you do as a dad to help your children succeed?
5. If you could, would there be anything you would like to go back in time and tell yourself about being a father?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your role as a father?
7. (Be sure to thank the father for participating. Re-assure him of confidentiality of all of the information gathered, including the responses.)

Appendix C.

Boot Camp for New Dads Session Plans

Typical class enrollment: One class coach, two to three veteran dads and their babies, six to eight rookie dads.

Class goals:

1. Begin to develop the fathering role.
2. Support mom.
3. Bond with their new baby.
4. Lead a safe transition home for their baby and mom.

#	Segment	Time	Hour
1.	Welcome and Introductions: Class coach and participants introduce themselves. Explanation of the roles of the class coach, rookie dads, veteran dads and the babies. The babies' needs may drive the curriculum such as needing a diaper change or needing to be soothed while crying. The rookie dads share any pressing questions they have coming in. The veteran dads share any opening words of wisdom.	15 min.	15 min.
2.	What was your father like? With the class coach going first, each man takes a turn talking about their relationship with their father, especially during their earliest years. This exercise helps the rookie dads understand this is their starting point for developing their own fathering role.	15 min.	30 min.
3.	New mom challenges: A discussion about the stresses the new mom is going through such as weight gain, food cravings and emotional stress, and how the new dads can step up and support her.	10 min.	40 min.
4.	Teamwork: How are you working together right now? What are your plans for bringing the baby home? Veteran dads share how the plan always changes.	10 min.	50 min.
5.	Going to the hospital: Packing the mom's bag and packing a dad's bag.	5 min.	55 min.
6.	At the hospital: Advocating for mom at the hospital. Supporting the delivery room plan – who gets in and who gets out. Changing baby's first diaper. Presenting the baby to the grandfathers.	10 min.	1 hr. & 5 min.
7.	Coming home: Enforcing your quiet days plan. Messages to friends and family on the answering machine and social media. Enlisting support from friends and family when they visit.	10 min.	1 hr. & 15 min.
8.	Break: Rookie dads make sure they have washed their hands before returning from the break.	10 min.	1 hr. & 25 min.
9.	Veteran dad and baby time: Two or three rookie dads gather around each veteran dad and baby. The rookie dads take turns holding the baby and ask questions of the veteran dad.	35 min.	2 hrs.

10.	Post-Partum issues: Discussion of the differences between simple “baby blues”, post-partum depression, and post-partum psychosis, including the supporting role the fathers have.	10 min.	2 hrs. & 10 min.
11.	Crying babies: A review of how to deal with a crying baby using the “What, when, how and what works” method.	10min.	2 hrs. & 20 min.
12.	Safety: A review of the major safety issues the dads can take care of in the home, including shaken baby syndrome, pets, safety latches, toxic materials, car seats, and baby equipment (strollers, bassinets, etc.).	20 min.	2 hrs. & 40 min.
13.	Review of the rookie dads’ concerns list: Did we answer your questions and concerns?	5 min.	2 hrs. & 45 min.
14.	Veteran dads parting words of wisdom	5 min.	2 hrs. 50 min.
15.	One thing I have learned: Rookie dads share what they will tell the moms they learned from the class today.	5 min.	2 hrs. 55 min.
16.	Closing activities: Passing out of certificates, Hit the Ground Crawling books, other brochures from the hospital, and gift books for the veteran dads.	5 min.	3 hours

Handouts and Materials List:

1. **Certificate of completion**, signed and dated by the class coach.
2. **“Hit the Ground Crawling”**. This book was authored by Greg Bishop, the founder of Boot Camp for New Dads. It is a “how to” book for new fathers, based on the workshop and includes contributions from all of the programs that provide the workshop.
3. **“Daddy and Me”** board book. This is a gift book presented to the veteran dad and baby in appreciation for helping with the class.
4. **Optional assorted brochures**
 - A. Dads Adventure. An eight page magazine published by Boot Camp for New Dads that reviews the information presented in the workshop.
 - B. Fathers of Young Children. A flyer promoting a more in-depth four session course for fathers on children birth to 8 years old.

- C. Period of Purple Crying. A one page flyer, National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome, concerning the period during a baby's first year when the baby may cry more than they did previously.
- D. Dads Tips. A one page flyer from the National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome on specific techniques for dads to avoid physically abusing their baby.
- E. Healthy Start. A brochure promoting the local Healthy Start program.

Templates of Coding Forms

Appendix D.

Open Coding

1. How do you perceive your role as a father?
 - A. Provider
 - B. Nurturer
 - C. Disciplinarian
 - D. Teacher
 - E. Playmate
 - F. Protector F-2 Example, role model F-3 Team with wife F-4 Father first

Code	Quote

2. What have you learned about being a father and how have you learned it?
 - G. Patience
 - H. Own father (& or in-law)
 - I. Friends, associates
 - J. Forgiveness
 - K. Language model. K-2. Other Books K-3. Doing it over K-4 Father first K-5 Teamwork (with wife) K-6 Loving K-7 Teacher K-8 Boot Camp K-9 Classes K-10 Grow fast K-11 Differences K-12 Experience

Code	Quote

3. What past experiences impacted your role as a father, either positively or negatively?
 - L. Family Death

- M. Having children
- N. Previous family
- O. Own family growing up
- P. Forgiveness P-2 Wife's family P-3 Past childcare role P-4 Father first decision P-5 Learning Patience P-6 Boot Camp P-7 Start earlier P-8 Friends dads

Code	Quote

4. What things do you do as a dad to help your children succeed?
- Q. Choices
 - R. Experiences, make mistakes
 - S. Educator role
 - T. Nurturer
 - U. Example

Code	Quote

5. If you could, would there be anything you would go back in time and tell yourself about being a father?
- V. No – enjoyed learning process
 - W. Don't be scared
 - X. A lot to learn, challenging
 - Y. Don't hurry to start family
 - Z. Start earlier Z-2 Patience Z-3 Play Z-4 Father first

Code	Quote

Appendix E.

Axial Coding Sample

How do you perceive your role as a father?

- A. Provider -X
- B. Nurturer- X, X, X, X, X = 5
- C. Disciplinarian – X, X
- D. Teacher – X, X, X, X, X, X, X, X = 8
- E. Playmate – X. X, X. X
- F. Protector – X. X, X, X, X, X, X = 7
 - F-2 Example, role model – X, X, X, X
 - F-3 Team with wife – X, X, X
 - F-4 Father first – X, X

Code	Quote - I
A.	
B.	
C.	
D, E.	
F.	

Code	Quote II
F-2	

Code	Quote - II
F-3	

Template of Permission Form

Appendix F.

Letter of Consent

A Study of the Process of Developing Fatherhood for Men Who Participated in the Boot Camp for New Dads Workshop

Dear Study Participant,

My name is Bruce Sheppard and I am a Doctor of Education student at George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon. I am conducting doctoral dissertation research of the process of developing fatherhood for men who have participated in the Boot Camp for New Dads workshop. I am inviting you to participate in a 30 to 60 minute interview concerning your perceptions of the development of your fathering role. The interview questions will be general in nature and will deal with your perceptions of your role as a father.

The findings of this research will be used in my doctoral dissertation as well as contribute to the body of knowledge regarding fathering issues.

There are minimal risks associated with these interviews. As indicated, the personal interview questions are general in nature and should be difficult or stressful. Be assured your participation is entirely voluntary and that you may pause or terminate the interview at any time, and/or decline to answer any of the interview questions.

Information gathered through these personal interviews and the findings of this study will be used in my doctoral dissertation. This information may also be used in future conference presentations and/or journal articles. I will be recording the interview with a digital recorder and will be transcribed. Analysis and presentation of the information will be completely anonymous to the public and confidential. Personal information and the identities of the participants will be completely confidential.

All of the electronic (digital recordings, software programs) and paper (consent letters, demographic forms) materials will be accessed only by with me and kept securely for at least three years. After three years all digital audio recordings will be deleted along with any other applicable items.

I appreciate your interest and consideration of this study. If you decide to participate you will be assisting in the development and improvement of father support and education programs. You may contact me at (503) 585-0738 or bss56@comcast.net with any questions you may have about this study. You may also contact Dr. Gerald Tiffin, director of the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership and director of the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University, at (503) 871-4776 if you have any additional questions.

Participant Signature _____

Researcher Signature _____

Additional Template of Instrument Used**Appendix G.****Demographics Form**

1. **Name** _____

2. **Ethnicity:**

African American Asian Latino Native American White Other _____

3. **Are you currently:**

Married Living with child's mom (unmarried) Divorced

Not living with child's mom Other _____

4. **Number of children: (explain circumstances):** _____

5. **Annual Family Income:**

Under \$15,000 \$15,001 - \$20,000 \$20,001 - \$30,000 \$30,001 - \$40,000

\$40,001 - \$50,000 \$50,001 - \$60,000 \$60,001 - \$75,000 \$75,000 and above

