EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP QUALITY OF FATHERS WITH THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

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Examining the relationship quality of fathers with their young children is a multi-manuscript dissertation. Three studies were conducted using the Dynamic Maturation Model of Attachment [DMM] as a framework for exploring the relationship of fathers with their young children. The first study explored the father as a driver in the attachment relationship through phenomenological interviews. The second study explored how the infant becomes actively involved in the attachment relationship through phenomenological interviews. The final study explored using the CARE-Index as a way to measure the quality of the relationship based on video-taped interaction of the father and child in a play setting.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. I dedicate it to my grandparents, who taught me to be good to everyone and that hard work will pay off; to my mother, who worked hard to make sure my siblings and I had opportunities to be successful; and, of course, to my wife—you are my foundation and I am grateful every day for you and our growing family. Also, I dedicate this to my daughters: you are the reason I do the work I do. You have impacted my life and continue to be the force that drives me to make a difference and be an advocate for change. Lastly, this work is also dedicated to all of my friends and the fathers with whom I have shared so many stories throughout this process.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Paper and Key Concept Explanations: Overview of the Conceptual Framework for Exploring the Quality of a Father's Relationship

The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of this dissertation and a theoretical framework for the ensuing chapters. To achieve that goal, this chapter will explore the meaning of quality in a father's relationship with his young child within the theoretical framework of the Dynamic Maturational Model [DMM] of attachment. This framework provides the background for all three studies in this dissertation. Using concepts from the DMM, linkages between the chapters will be described. Finally, the chapter concludes with the utility of the studies within this dissertation, focusing on the potential gaps regarding the quality of a father's relationship with his child, especially as this author believes the inclusion of the father in exploring these relationships is crucial for providing an overview of the functioning behavior of the family.

DMM of Attachment and Relationship Quality across the Lifespan

The DMM is a potentially useful tool for exploring the father–child attachment relationship. The tool provides new ways to conceptualize development and identify distortions in the mental processing of information, specifically information relevant to feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The intent of the DMM is to describe the self-protective strategies and patterns of speakers' mental processing. Attachment is seen in the DMM not as a stable property but as a strategy, mostly used unconsciously to attempt to keep safe within relationships and produce the next generation (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Genetic factors are recognized, yet the individual can only be understood within his or her relational–cultural context (Pocock, 2010). The model is synchronous with the idea of a coevolutionary process (Maturana, 2002) within which individuals attempt to find the best fit for each other. Although mutual adaptation is in play, the DMM anticipates this mutuality as being uneven, with

children, who have not had consistent and attuned interactions over time, usually adapting more to their caregivers than the other way around (Stierlin, 1959), particularly given the greater danger arising from vulnerabilities in childhood (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Pocock, 2010). Maladaptation is viewed in the DMM as the continuing use of a once-adapted relational strategy, which has, other than in extreme situations, outgrown its usefulness (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The DMM is developmental in that the availability of new experiences in ever-expanding, relational–cultural contexts allows for an increasing range of strategies used over one's lifetime (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Pocock, 2010).

Specifically, this dissertation is the presentation of a view of early relational quality, which contributes to the development of attachment strategies for psychological and physical protection over the life span. The focus of this work will remain on assessing and describing the quality of the father-child relationship. Before the quality of a relationship can be assessed, decisions must be made regarding the specific aspect of the relationship to be assessed. A father could have a number of possible interactive roles with his young child. The fathers in this research will be viewed as caregivers, social interactants and attachment figures to their children. Thus, the main exploration will be geared toward these roles. However, each of these roles is separate in terms of assessment and involves different functions for paternal behavior. Any assessment procedure must be sensitive to both the specific aspect of the relationship being assessed and the nature of the situation used to elicit the behavior (Crittenden, 2015). Assessments of several aspects of the father-child relationship are necessary before one can claim to have assessed the entire relationship. This dissertation only attempts to begin this process by assessing the father as a caregiver, a social interactant and an attachment figure through play and phenomenological interviews. There will be pieces of the father as caregiver

and father as an attachment figure presented, however, due to the limits of this dissertation, these areas will only be built upon from the father as a social interactant. The social interaction focus allows the researcher to develop the role of the attachment figure and caregiver as a future-oriented projection of the interactions being explored. This role will be viewed as a critical influence on the child's cognitive, language, and social development, therefore, influencing the other two roles a father may potentially play (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Determining the father's interpersonal relationship quality with his young child, and combining that with the interactional strategies of other family members, creates a framework for assessing how a family functions, which is based on multiple sources of information and observations. The definition of a family for this work includes a mother/woman and male/man in a two person relationship plus a child or children.

An attachment strategy is a relationship construct, which describes a specific relationship pattern with a caregiver (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Each strategy has associated variables regarding how a parent and child respond to each other over time to maintain safety and comfort. Recognition of the quality of the father-child interaction may provide information that is useful to social workers who wish to understand how the father and child may have interacted in the past. This information could help clinicians begin to formulate questions and hypotheses to target family interventions. Relationship quality can be observable and then it might not require an infant to articulate a relationship verbally, although they do require the child to relate to the parent as they normally do, thus telling a story of the parent–child relationship (Kozlowska & Hanney, 2002).

In order to assess relationships, the DMM has several assessments that cover the life span. The DMM consists of seven assessment tools (Farnfield, Hautamaki, Norbech & Sahhar,

2010) as presented in Table 1-1 below:

Table 1-1

Seven Assessment Tools of the DMM

Assessment	Age Range	Method
Infant CARE-Index	1 day–15 months	Adult–child play
Toddler CARE-Index	16–72 months	Adult–child play
Infant Strange Situation Procedure (SSP)	11–15 months	Separation and reunion
Pre-school Assessment of Attachment (PAA)	16–60 months	Separation and reunion
School Age Assessment of Attachment (SAA)	6–12 years	Child tells stories about pictures
Transition to Adulthood Attachment Interview (TAAI)	16–25 years	Attachment interview
Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)	25 years on	Attachment interview

Note. Adapted from "DMM Assessments of Attachment and Adaptation: Procedures,

Validity and Utility," by S. Farnfield, A. Hautamaki, P. Norbech and N. Sahhar, 2010, *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 15,* p. 318.

During childhood, a child's context is ever-changing; each time a new challenge is faced, an opportunity presents itself to correct a past error and generate a more adaptive behavior (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). If a person is unable to correct early maladaptive behaviors, he or she may continue to use them when parenting their own child. In viewing attachment across the life span, maladaptive behaviors are seen as serving a function (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). To understand the dynamic of being a father, it may be useful for a person to understand their own developmental experiences as a child, and the quality of their interaction with their father, to develop an awareness of their basis for parenting.

Utilizing a current assessment tool for the DMM with fathers, such as the CARE-Index, may provide an opportunity to gather data on the usefulness of including the DMM model when assessing father–child relationship quality (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Other assessments may be useful to assess the quality of the father–child relationship, although due to the complexity in the description and the limitations, the CARE-Index will be used in Chapter 4. Neither the CARE-Index nor any of the other of the DMM assessments mentioned above have been used for assessing the quality of the father–child relationship.

The quality of the relationship a father has with his child builds into patterns of attachment in adulthood for that child (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). This starts with early interaction. Fathers, similarly to mothers, have their unique way of interacting with their children. Doucet (2006) elaborated on this viewpoint, "A position on fathering is one that should work towards challenging gendered asymmetries around care and employment, encouraging and embracing active fathering, while always remembering and valuing the long historical tradition

of women's work, identities and power in caregiving" (p. 30). The difference does not always lead to disadvantage, nor does it always mean unequal, which is why this research begins with an exploration of fathers' voices and how the fathers describe the quality of their interactions.

The findings indicate that those who experience poor quality parental relationships and have maladaptive patterns are not fated to follow this attachment behavior forever (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Pearson et al., 1994). In other words, researchers have discussed the feasibility of a stable attachment later in development, given the right conditions. The extent of one's ability to remain resilient in the face of stress and danger is in turn connected to the quality of early relationships (Walsh, Shulman, Bar-On, & Tsur, 2006). Crittenden and Landini (2011) took this one step further and stated that an individual can develop alternative attachment patterns over time by internally processing the correct strategy for dealing with stressful and dangerous situations over a life span. Through this research this author aims to describe how fathers interact with their children and to assess the quality of this interaction (with play viewed as a key part of this interaction).

Overview and Rationale of the Links between the Manuscripts

This section provides a brief overview linking the three manuscripts based on the framework presented earlier and ties this to the main research focus of each manuscript. Within three self-contained papers, the relationship quality of fathers and their young children are examined. The first two studies involved a phenomenological method designed to explore the lived experiences of fathers and the interactions they had with their children. These papers represent a qualitative exploration of fathers' lived experiences in their role of being fathers to young children. The overarching question for the first paper was: How do fathers describe their relationship experiences with their infants? This question of seeking understanding was best

suited to the qualitative practice of phenomenology.

The second paper involved the use of the same methodology and sample as the first, however the focus was on the affection between a father and his young child. The overarching question for the second paper was: How do fathers reciprocally share affection with their children? This question of seeking understanding was best suited to the qualitative tradition of phenomenology. A semi-structured, in-depth, phenomenological interview was used to expand the understanding of how men describe and feel regarding sharing affection with their children.

In the third paper, the CARE-Index was used to evaluate the quality of father–child interaction. This pilot study involved observation to explore father child interaction between three adult patterns of sensitivity and four infant patterns of cooperation. This instrument has not been used with fathers on a regular basis and presents a potential opportunity for future research.

This research has additional advantages, however there are limitations. Like other qualitative studies, the in-depth interviews can be emotional, and the information provided may not be representative of the views of all fathers who have similar characteristics and circumstances. Similarly, while quantitative studies are used to identify which topics are related, they often leave unanswered questions about how and why these relationships exist. This is where in-depth interviews can help. The fathers' voices and stories speak about themselves and their children, help with the interpretation of the findings from quantitative studies, and form a connection to the fathers beyond the statistics. By listening to the fathers chosen for this research, the complexities of their lives enable thinking to move beyond stereotypes, labels, and misconceptions. The papers reduce the fathers' powerful experiences to certain themes and quotes; however, these experiences, filtered through the author's voice, remain powerful in context and maintain the essence of the occurrence. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews

help readers feel empathy and keep an open mind toward the nature of a father's relationship with his young child, while the Infant CARE-Index helps place the fathers' interactions in context. The results across all three papers were an attempt at a balanced view of how fathers promote quality in their relationship with their young children.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 presents a phenomenological study involving an exploration of how fathers describe their relationship experiences with their infants. Chapter 3 presents a second phenomenological study that explores affection between a father and his young child. Chapter 4 applies the CARE-Index to measure quality of the father-child relationship in 21 father-child dyads. In Chapter 5, cross-cutting themes between chapters 2 through 4 are presented as well as a discussion of the interactions of fathers with their children and the quality of father–child interaction. Lastly, the conclusions and implications of these studies are provided for research, policy, and practice purposes. Opportunities for expanding this information to social work practice are introduced and developed more in each manuscript and the concluding chapter.

It is noted that father-child relationships can be very challenging to access. The bulk of scholarly attention has focused on the behavior of fathers rather than the quality of the interactional relationship they have with their children (Lamb, 2010). Whereas an interaction consists of observable behaviors, a relationship is a construct reflecting a common thread running through a series of interactions (Crittenden, 2015). Consequently, it is important to distinguish between behavior specific to an instance of interaction and the aspects of that interaction reflecting the nature of the underlying relationship. The relationship aspect of a given interaction is conceptualized in this dissertation as behavior that reflects the expectations, based on previous interactions, of each individual regarding the other's behavior. Thus, relationships

are best assessed in dyadic situations that have as few environmental influences and variations as possible and encourage the behavioral enactment of each partner's expectations (Crittenden, 2015). This research explores dyadic relationships using both qualitative inquiry and observational methods to explore the relationship quality between a father and his young child.

The difficulty in assessing the quality of the father-child relationship is compounded, because relationships are not necessarily of uniform quality across all aspects of the relationship. For example, a father may be very capable and responsible as a playmate but, at the same time, be withdrawn as a caregiver. It is important to identify the context in which the father-child relationship will be assessed in the dissertation by using a play-based observational assessment and qualitative inquiry. This approach begins to acknowledge one aspect of the multifaceted relationship that is being assessed in each dissertation chapter. Hence, through the use of phenomenology in this research, the author plans to begin to contribute to the literature by building knowledge around the meanings fathers ascribe to their first interactions with their children and how each father of the assessed dyad describes affection. Affection can contribute to building the attachment relationship between father and child. By approaching the father–child relationship as interactional behavior that reflects the expectations of each regarding the other's behavior, based on previous interactions, the researcher will build on the experiences of play in an attempt to develop an understanding of quality. Play is a core component of the Child–Adult Relationship Experimental Index (CARE-Index) and is used to explore the quality of father–child interaction. Subsequently, as a social worker, one can use multiple data sources to look beyond fathers initial framing of their own types of interactions and play by understanding the meanings behind their first experiences of fatherhood and sharing affection with their child. These father-child interactions are not fixed, but contextually negotiated and renegotiated

(Doucet, 2006). One form of play or interaction will not work in every situation, and fathers need to adjust to meet the ever-changing state of the parent–child interaction taking into account many factors beyond play.

Development of Attachment Theory

The components of attachment theory have been seen as fundamental to the parent-child relationship, this paper's analysis of the father-child relationship must address the different components of attachment. In considering how attachment has developed over time, this author faces the critical task of examining the assumptions and underlying statements regarding attachment. The creation of attachment theory, beginning with Bowlby (1958) and later with Ainsworth (1973), was not only a product of the zeitgeist of the times, but also a rejection of the old ideas it intended to replace. Older conceptions of attachment continue as new attachment researchers develop and refine their perspective on existing frameworks of attachment. Bowlby (1951) began with the assumption that attachment is a biological necessity for infant survival, children were then motivated by a strong unconscious need for their mother, and maternal deprivation led to orphaned children's feelings of anxiety, isolation, and later delinquency (see also Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Following Bowlby's (1951) conceptualization of attachment, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) identified three primary patterns or strategies of attachment, which reflect the relationship between attachment and exploration. Secure infants use the caregiver to explore their environment and return to the caregiver when they are distressed (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In contrast, avoidant infants emphasize autonomy as they appear interested in their exploration, and avoid the caregiver during distress (Ainsworth et al. 1978). Finally, resistant infants emphasize their attachment needs at the expense of exploration; they easily become distressed

and are difficult to soothe (Ainsworth et al., 1978). These attachment strategies were later expanded by Main and Cassidy (1988), Main and Goldwyn (1994), Main and Solomon (1986), Cassidy and Marvin (1987, 1992), and Crittenden (1992, 1995).

Together, Bowlby's and Ainsworth's work provided the push to move the field forward, however alone there would have been little expansion. Just as the results of this dissertation alone provide some forward movement for the field, combined with other sources of data—both from the family and other samples of fathers—comparisons for discussion of overall family functioning can be drawn. The current period of attachment research began with Bowlby's (1958, 1969, 1973) seminal theory and Ainsworth's (1973) conceptual and methodological advances (Thompson & Raikes, 2003). Using creative methods to study the quality of the father-child relationship moves research in a new direction, thus helping to achieve this balance of focus on the importance of early attachment and the potential influence on later attachment. Similarly, this author believes a discussion regarding fathers, as an integral part of family functioning, needs to source information from various areas to facilitate change rather than provoke thought alone.

Brief Discussion of Previous Father–Child Research and Moving Forward

This research is an attempt to address an important gap in the literature by focusing on a dyadic relationship, which has received little attention from social work researchers, and using methodologies that might provide a more accurate and useful understanding of the quality of this relationship than previous father research. In every period of U.S. history, new economic priorities, domestic ideals, and mothers' roles have been important factors in promoting new ideals of the father (Griswold, 1993). The central economic factor in determining the essence of fatherhood has been the relationship between work and family—for example, changes in a

father's work schedule, a mother's work schedule, or even both (Griswold, 1993). Throughout history, fathers have appeared to show different levels of involvement in their children's lives based on the economic conditions of the time (Roeters, der Lippe, & Kluwer, 2009).

Coltrane and Parke (1998) and Lamb (2010) argued that literature on fathers is gaining increased interest and attention. Nonetheless, this research is by no means designed to address all the gaps in paternal literature; it is, however, a contribution to the growing literature base due to the author's exploration of the meanings fathers ascribe to their interactions and the attempt to assess the quality of father–child interaction. Furthermore, over time, the findings contained within this study, combined with other attachment measures, are applied to contribute to the existing research regarding fathers. A key component of the structure for achieving this is using the DMM of attachment as the framework for this study.

Despite an increase in studies focused on fathers over the past few decades, there is limited understanding of the context within which fathers describe their interactions with their children or of the measures addressing the unique quality of this relationship. However, information on relational quality may be useful to social workers, who are the ones working directly with families. In the short term, social workers might learn methods of enhancing services to fathers and families as a result of this new knowledge by using the words of fathers to design and deliver programs. Social workers working directly with fathers may potentially gain an understanding of the family dynamics that contribute to the meanings fathers describe within their interactions with their children. In the long term, when social workers strive to improve the overall family functioning of the families they serve, they will include as many family members' interactions with a child as possible. This study is aimed at building on the information gathered to further research involving fathers and their young children. The study utilized

phenomenology and the CARE-Index to collect the data in a way that allows for the maintenance of a father-focus. Decisions were made to concentrate on specific forms of data collection to emphasize the need to use multiple sources of information beyond these chosen methods. One cannot rely solely on the information presented and must continue to assess relationships using multiple methods. However, data from these methods can begin the exploration of the dyadic relationship between father and child, while encouraging the use of other measures to promote a clearer picture of family functioning. Each study potentially presents unique information about the dynamic of the father–child relationship by focusing on the interaction between father and child.

The researcher's intention is to build on attachment research from this dissertation through further use of DMM assessments to eventually contribute to the construction of family functional formulations (FFF) (Crittenden & Landini, 2011) in which overall family functioning is outlined based on DMM theory. FFFs are combinations of DMM assessments for all family members involved in a child's life (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Fathers are often overlooked in FFFs due to a lack of presence in DMM assessments. Utilizing the data collected in this research builds new knowledge around how multiple sources of information can impact the FFF. The initial stage of a DMM-based FFF is the assessment of the interaction of all family members. The second part is an overall picture of the family considering the risk factors for this family; special attention is paid to comparing the critical dangers for each family member in terms of compatibility. When a functional overview of the family system appears to be cohesive in terms of understanding (1) how the family organizes itself to identify and protects itself from similar or different dangers and (2) how the protective functions are assigned to the various family members, then the FFF is ready to be integrated with all other relevant relationship strategies.

These would include a history of the family; a clinical picture (including one or more descriptive diagnoses for family members); a functional analysis of how symptomatic or maladaptive behavior has worked; and a functional analysis of how clinical interventions have worked so far. The aim of this integration is to identify a "critical cause of change" (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). If the family is actively using its resources to protect itself from danger (even if its functioning is partly incoherent and ultimately stalled), then it can be hypothesized that if some parts of the system were changed, this might change significantly the state of the system. The "critical cause of change" would be the part of the system that, if targeted by intervention, might most economically restore the ability of the system to self-organize and regulate around the goals of protection, comfort, and reproduction for all members. The idea of a critical cause of change, as the principal aim of the intervention, supports a transition from a deficit-focused approach to intervention to a strength-focused approach. Intervention is not conceptualized by the DMM as a series of patches on a faulty situation, but as the most focused and economical action that maximizes the family's potential to self-repair and reorganize.

Crittenden and Landini (2011) explained, DMM FFF is based on multiple sources of information, concerns for the entire family, focuses on strengths, and highlights reciprocal and systemic effects. Specifically, the DMM FFF addresses how things are now, how they came to be so, what maintains them as they are, and what might change them and in which ways. The assessment of the family is then utilized to determine the critical cause of change. If changed, the causal factor would initiate a cascade of other changes, ultimately resolving threats to family functioning. Using the CARE-Index with fathers is a portion of this overall assessment. Having the CARE-Index for father–infant, mother–infant, a parent interview, and individual adult attachment interviews for both parents provides a clearer picture of how a family may be

functioning at a given time. Given the lack of research involving fathers and these DMM assessments, this author strives to contribute to the existing knowledge base by expanding the literature regarding a father's relational strategies and the meanings they give to their relationships.

This researcher was interested in understanding the quality of the interaction fathers have with their children. Through phenomenological interviews and video-taped assessments of interactions, this researcher sought to uncover the stories and experiences of men who were willing to talk about being a father and play with their child on camera. From this data, the hope was to learn something that could be useful in social work practice and academic teaching. The DMM attachment-centered stance, as described earlier, formed the basis of this dissertation and the research that informs it, particularly regarding the maintenance of a father-focus throughout the chapters.

The research is intended to provide three potentially valuable contributions to the current knowledge base. The first contribution is that the research can be used to address an important gap in the literature by focusing on a dyadic relationship that has received little attention from social work researchers. The bulk of attention has focused on the behavior of fathers rather than the essence of the interactional relationship they have with their children. The second contribution is the examination of a father's unique perspective on his relationship with his young child. Little is known about the relationship of a father and a young child regarding the mutual effects of this dyadic relationship. Even less is known about the dynamics of this father–infant interactional behavior. This knowledge may be helpful not only for social workers, but also for the entire family unit by exploring the strengths and weaknesses in terms of overall family functioning. The third contribution is, each paper is utilized to address an important

element of the father–child relationship. The father, as a member of the family and as an individual, has the potential to shape a child's success as they age and develop. Understanding the uniqueness of a father's attachment relationship with his child over time through multiple sources of data may allow families an opportunity to promote strengths and address areas of challenges in a more productive way.

The potential value of this study to social work practitioners and researchers is substantial because numerous areas of the father–child interactional relationships remain unexplored. The values of the social work profession, its long history of serving families, and the professional commitment to ethics, all enabled this study to be a contribution to furthering the development of knowledge around fathers and their interactions with their children. The researcher attempts to maintain that this relationship does not exist alone and is a part of a broader interactional system that constitutes many different structures a family can take. These common goals include the continuation of the effort to develop and advance knowledge and practice with fathers and their attachment relationships with their children.

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CHAPTER 2

Relationship Experiences of Fathers with Young Children

Fathers are able to play a crucial role in the development of their children within the context of their families (Amato, 1998; Castillo et al., 2011; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Lamb, 1997, 2004; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005). This is because the interactions that occur between fathers and their children may be the beginning of their attachment relationship (Belsky, 1984; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2011; Horowitz, 2008). This may mean that the father may adapt in different ways to the child, allowing new interpersonal connections to be made across dyadic interactions with their child (Antonucci & Mikus, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 2000). However, the impact of the male parent on child development is not always considered, because research has historically focused on the role of the mother within family research (e.g., Sevón, 2012). This gap has been acknowledged as researchers have begun to recognize the importance of exploring the role and responsibilities of fathers within families (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Lamb, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Yoshida, 2012). Therefore, it is important to explore how fathers describe their relationship experiences with their young children within their interactions (Daly, 2007).

The relational experiences of a father with his young child can be explained through the proximal process, which is found in the bioecological model established by Bronfenbrenner. A proximal process is a repeated activity that an individual engages in over some time with a person, an object, or a symbol (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Little is known about the specific proximal processes fathers engage in with their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2008). A father's sense of identity is formed by his experiences, feelings, and beliefs (Seligman & Darling, 1991). Those men who desire to become fathers typically have their identities shaped as they mature, yet the paternal identity that they have created begins during the pregnancy of

their female partner (Dheensa, Williams, & Metcalfe, 2013). Men may identify as a social interactant, a caregiver, or an attachment figure depending on their relationship with their child and broader family system (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Hofner, Schadler & Richter, 2011). However, this is not always the case, as some men have no desire to be a father, cannot be a father, or succumb to pressures in relation to fatherhood, leading them to abandon their families (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Hofner, Schadler & Richter, 2011). Hofner et al. (2011) interviewed fathers regarding the development of their identity as a father throughout the transition to parenthood. Results of their interviews indicated that although the fathers interviewed wanted to be more involved and nurturing than their own fathers had been, they felt the need to provide economically was greater. "Key narrations for not becoming a nurturer for one's child are arranged around the topics of social environment, financial circumstances, and biological conditions" (Hofner et al., 2011, p. 672).

Dheensa et al. (2013) conducted interviews with married men regarding their involvement with prenatal screenings for their infants. Results from these interviews revealed that the fathers' involvement in the screenings allowed them to begin to add the identity of father into their self-concept. Through their participation in the screening appointments during their spouses' pregnancy, gaining information and making decisions, fathers were able to put action to their thoughts and beliefs regarding becoming a father. Dheensa et al. (2013) stated that the men form a "child schema" in which there may be some resemblance between themselves and their unborn child. The discourse that develops in these instances, according to the DMM, is the father's development of an internal working model in which he may be trying to process what this new role means in regards to his own self-identification (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). In addition to the genetic link through which the fathers hope to identify with their child, they form

social father–child activities they wish to engage in with their offspring, such as playing catch or teaching other skills.

Parental self-efficacy has been defined as a parent's belief that he or she has the knowledge, skills, and competency to be an effective parent to their children (Bandura, 1997, as cited in DesJardin, 2005). Bandura (1997) and DesJardin (2005) both surmised that self-efficacy may enhance parental involvement, which in turn, may influence child-level outcomes. For example, efficacious parents may seek the knowledge necessary to help their children attain their goals (DesJardin, 2005). These fathers may appear more comfortable in the multiple roles a father may participate in while raising his child, yet he is still trying to define who he is personally within this new role.

Fathers' self-esteem may influence the experiences they share with their children (Lamb & Meyer, 1991). How fathers feel about themselves may influence their interactions with their children, spouses, and family (Seligman & Darling, 2007). When fathers draw a significant amount of fulfillment from their children and their role as a father, they may experience decreased self-esteem when their children cannot fulfill the expectations they have for them. As a result, fathers may feel a sense of inferiority. As a result of these feelings, fathers may be less satisfied with their children and with their marriage (Lamb & Meyer, 1991). These characteristics of an individual may influence how they experience time and activities with their young children.

Research indicates that a father's experiences with his child may vary depending on his parenting style and the developmental needs of the child (Young & Roopnarine, 1994). Despite the lack of current research regarding the specific proximal processes, fathers are typically

associated with two proximal processes: play and communication (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Research regarding these two processes indicates specific outcomes for children and fathers.

Research regarding fathers' involvement and interactions with their children reveals that fathers engage in communication patterns and exchanges that are similar to those employed by mothers (Parke, 1996). Fathers are competent social partners along with mothers in responding to an infant's cries and other communication cues (Parke, 1996). Fathers often respond to an infant's cues by talking to their infant (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Gleason (1975) posited the bridge theory within gendered communication research, suggesting that fathers use complex language structures (Parke, 1996) or new vocabulary in communication with their children to prepare them for communication interactions with others. These interactions begin to build reciprocal communication between the father and child potentially leading to more interpersonal connection between the dyad.

Although the aforementioned studies provide a valuable contribution to the body of fatherhood research, the majority of them provide only a narrow window through which to view the personal experiences of fathers. As most fathers could only reflect and comment on their parenting experiences during the first few weeks of their babies being born, their narratives lacked an experiential trajectory over time; this current study was therefore employed to gather more of these experiences beyond the first few weeks of life. Therefore, this chapter is a presentation of a qualitative exploration of fathers' lived experiences with their infants, focusing on the development that occurs both individually and through the bond between the father and children.

Research Question

In order to enhance understanding of the fathers' perspective, it is vital for professionals to have an appreciation of the fathers' personal experiences. By using the existing father and DMM literature as a guide, the aim of this researcher was to add to the knowledge base of fatherhood research by exploring the lived experience of fathers during the first year of their child's life. By capturing these data, participants were able to describe the development of their internal working models, and the reciprocity of their interactions as a key part of becoming a father. Fathers presented as an enactor of interactional behaviors, potentially initiating the attachment process. The research question aimed to look closely at how the attachment process begins and to illuminate its origins. The father is moving the process forward, adding further variety to their narratives and giving a sense of how their experiences change over time. Furthermore, by building on previously published research with new data, this research pursues new insights. The research question asked was: How do fathers describe their early relationship experiences with their infants?

Methods

In order to answer the research question, a phenomenological method of inquiry was applied. Phenomenology is utilized to seek rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences and is designed to protect and integrate subjective experience by allowing the construction of shared meanings and common understandings (Moran, 2000). For example, at the moment when the participant is describing or self-interpreting being, the researcher holds a phenomenological stance—keeping himself or herself open to that lived experience of the participant "in its wholeness" (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 18). This approach improves the ability of a researcher

to uncover the human interactions that take place by adding new perspectives that broaden knowledge of the phenomenon (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 18).

Through this researcher's own experiences as a father and a son, as well as his clinical and teaching experiences, he has lived experiences of being a father and working with fathers. He made an effort to understand the meaning of being a father, parenting a young child, and the emotions men experience during that time. Therefore, through the research topic, the questions used to address the phenomenon of a father's relational experiences with his child, and the tradition of social science philosophy, this researcher was able to uncover the experiences sought for this study.

Thus, the primary undertaking of this study was to understand participants' experiences in a new way—questioning the narrative, holding open the all possibilities, and letting the phenomenon show through the narrative (Moran, 2000; Patton, 2002). Each of these narrative accounts was read and reread by two researchers in order to perceive the shared meanings of a phenomenon. Therefore, this researcher "determine[d] the categories [themes], relationships and assumptions that inform[ed] the respondent's view of the world in general and of the topic in particular" (Basit, 2003, p. 143), while describing what "participants had in common (patterns) and bringing to light new understandings of these parents' experiences" (Creswell, 2009, p. 52).

The DMM guided this methodology allowing the researcher to apply the theoretical framework in the analysis. The DMM conceptualizes development and identifies distortions in the mental processing of information, specifically information relevant to feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Attachment is seen in the DMM not as a stable property but as a strategy, mostly used unconsciously to attempt to keep safe within relationships and produce the next generation (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Genetic factors are recognized, yet

the individual can only be understood within his or her relational–cultural context (Pocock, 2010). The DMM is developmental in that the availability of new experiences in ever-expanding, relational–cultural contexts allow for an increasing range of strategies used over one's lifetime (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Pocock, 2010). In addition, the researcher used the themes as ways to show fathers' understanding in what they do and demonstrate how that understanding affects their children, as well as themselves, in a dynamic interactional approach.

Participants

After the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, 10 participants were recruited through a small liberal arts faculty listserv and personal contacts. The inclusion criteria for this study were (1) that the participant was the biological father of a child age 0 to 1, and (2) the father had to live with their child from birth to the date of the interview.

The researcher decided that biological fathers provided a starting point from which future research could build, for the following reasons. Biological fathers who lived with their children were chosen as a foundation to shape future expansions of this research by having the potential for more interactive opportunities with their child. The researcher chose to include fathers with children between 0 and 1 year old to capture the early interactions of the father with his young child. Finally, the researcher chose to select participants who had lived with their children so the fathers could reference relational events.

Participants were chosen by convenience and availability for the study. The sample was selected purposefully from among fathers from the state of Michigan who had a child no older than one year. The sample was obtained from extended family and friends of faculty contacts and university programs focused on families at a Christian institution. This expanded the

snowball sample into the community outside of the institution. A recruitment email was sent to solicit participants who fit the inclusion criteria, and it requested a response from the potential participants via e-mail or phone. After participants replied, the researcher called or e-mailed the prospective participants to explain the study and verify that all of the inclusion criteria were met. The researcher scheduled interviews with participants at locations of their own choosing. Ten fathers participated in this research study, and all were Caucasian males. The fathers were also all employed outside of the home and between the ages of 18 and 38. The fathers had or were at the current time working on college degrees and 6 of the 10 were first time fathers.

Three acquaintances of the researcher were also approached, and each agreed to be a study participant. Contacts for successive interviews were gathered from each previous participant to give access to a larger number of fathers. An appropriate sample size for this type of phenomenological study "ranges from 5 to 25 participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 72). However, the central issue is not the size of the sample, but rather "the quality of the text and the way that the lines of inquiry are reshaped by the participants" (Benner, 1994, p. 107). The sample size is sufficiently large when commonalities begin to be repeated among participants, a situation often referred to as saturation (Patton, 2002). Rather than focusing on the size of the sample, researchers are encouraged to stop data collection when it becomes counterproductive and when new data do not add to the overall study. As the analysis begins to take shape, researchers need to be willing to remove data where necessary (Mason, 2010).

Data Collection Procedures

All procedures were reviewed and approved by the IRB of Michigan State University. After a participant was selected to be a part of the sample, an interview was arranged. Interviews began with a brief overview of the study and a complete review of the consent process.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions before proceeding. Interviews were digitally audio-recorded. The researcher took extensive notes on both content and process as each participant responded. To maximize narrative accuracy, the researcher transcribed each interview. Reflexive thoughts and comments were written in a journal upon the completion of each interview and revisited during coding. Information logs and an audit trail were maintained throughout the interviews, transcription, and coding processes.

The interviews, lasting from 1 to 1 1/2 hours, were completed in quiet, private locations (either at a university office or the participant's home). The location was designated by the participant and confirmed by the researcher to maximize confidentiality and privacy. The researcher conducted all 10 interviews, transcribed each interview, and hand-coded the data; he was the only person with access to all information and records. A faculty member, who is trained in qualitative methodology, reviewed the transcripts with the researcher to confirm the analysis completed by the researcher.

To address the deficit in knowledge about fathers' relational experiences with their children, a semi-structured, in-depth, phenomenological interview was chosen. A semi-structured interview form adapted from Fitton and Mooradian (2008) was utilized to target the relationship between father and child in a DMM of attachment context. Using phenomenological methods allows the researcher to explore and then describe the participants' experiences surrounding the research question (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions, adapted from Fitton & Mooradian (2008) and Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, (2014), prior to the interviews were:

- What are the first things that come to mind about your relationship with your child?

  Probes:

- Can you remember your first moments with your child?
- How would your friends and family describe your interactions?
- What would you like me to know about your relationship?

- How would you describe attachment?

  Probes:

  - What does it look like?
  - What kinds of activities would it include?
  - What does attachment feel like?

- What are your favorite things to do with your child?

  Probes:

  - How do you play together?
  - What do you play with?
  - Where do you go together?

- How has your life changed since you had your child?

  Probes:

  - Has anything surprised you about yourself?
  - Has anything surprised you about your child?
  - What are some of the difficult things?
  - What are some of the positive things?

- What helped you manage and/or cope with having an infant/child?

  Probes:

  - What supports you?
  - Who supports you?

- What keeps you going?

Analysis

Reflexivity. The researcher accepts the premise favored by qualitative researchers that state it is impossible to separate researchers from their research or for them to be neutral or unbiased (Daly, 2007; Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014); it becomes all the more important for researchers to be honest about their histories and reflect upon how that might influence the research (Daly, 2007). Daly (2007) defined reflexivity as "the ways in which a researcher critically monitors and understands the role of the self in the research endeavor" (p. 188). For this research, before beginning and during the process of data analysis, the researcher explored his biases, values, and knowledge of the topic. The researcher assessed his understandings and positioning in creating the following statement of reflexivity.

The researcher, Terry Keller. When considering the reasons for entering the social work field, it is important to understand my background. I grew up in a very rural community with limited resources. Very few individuals in that community continued on to college. Further, my childhood sensitized me to issues of limited father involvement, and being a father of young daughters impacts how I approach my work in the field of attachment and fatherhood, as my father was involved in a limited way.

I completed my master's in social work and another in business administration in St. Louis, Missouri, while working with both urban and rural families. After completing my training, I became a fully licensed social worker at both the clinical and macro level. I am also a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers. I have worked with numerous families and seen them struggle to make ends meet and come out on top. I have also seen the downside

of limited engagement of parents and the detrimental effect it can have on children. I maintain a strong interest in the early childhood years and father involvement, especially for children who are under five years of age. Children within this age range are developing at a rapid rate biologically, psychologically, and socially. My daughters are in this age range, and when I see their interactions with peers, parents, teachers, and friends, it fuels my interest in their developing interpretation of the world around them.

In this research, I expected to hear fathers describe whether and how being a father meets their expectations; I anticipated there would be a large number of fathers who talked about the stress and financial strain having a child brings. I also wondered, as I progressed through this project, about the significance of the father–child relationship that developed and how the strength of that relationship is shown outside of the home. I have questioned whether there can be a universal definition of fatherhood or father involvement, and I was curious how these fathers would describe their experiences and what it means to become a father. I tend to think that any definition in this area would have to be a very personal one that is based on unique experiences shared with one's children that is ever evolving in this relationship context.

Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis. Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis provided the structure for data analysis. To address the deficit in knowledge about fathers' relational experiences with their children, a semi-structured, in-depth, phenomenological interview was chosen as the best method to expand the understanding of what men hold to be true about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as demonstrated in their relationship experience with their young child. The following steps were taken to employ Colaizzi's (1978) process for phenomenological data analysis (cited in Sosha, 2012; Sanders, 2003; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

1. Each transcript was read and reread in order to obtain a general sense of the whole content.
2. For each transcript, significant statements that pertained to the phenomenon under the study were extracted. These statements were recorded on a separate sheet, noting their pages and line numbers.
3. Meanings were formulated from these significant statements.
4. The formulated meanings were then sorted into categories and themes.
5. The findings of the study were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under the study.
6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon was described.
7. Finally, validation of the findings was sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Step one. Each transcript was read several times to gain a sense of the whole content. During this stage, any thoughts, feelings, and ideas that had arisen due to this researcher's previous work with fathers and the DMM were added to the bracketing memo. This helped to explore the phenomenon as experienced by the participants themselves.

Step two. In this stage of the analysis, significant statements and phrases pertaining to the fathers' relational experiences with their children were extracted from each transcript. These statements were put in a Word document table. After extracting the significant statements from the transcripts, a faculty member trained in qualitative methodology and this researcher worked through the significant statements, aligning them with DMM theory. From the 10 verbatim transcripts, the researcher identified over 200 significant statements.

Step three. Meanings tied to DMM theory were formulated from the significant statements. Each underlying meaning was coded in one category as being reflective of a specific DMM concept. In the same way, the faculty member and this researcher compared the initial meaning with the DMM concept in order to maintain the consistency of descriptions. However, minimal differences were found between the fellow faculty member and this researcher. Both discussed the DMM theory at length prior to exploring meanings. This means that the statements and individual meanings were double-checked by a second researcher to ensure the validity and reliability of the process, as well as the accuracy of the meanings.

Step four. After reaching agreement on all formulated meanings, the process of grouping all these formulated meanings into categories that reflected the themes occurred. Each theme was coded to include all formulated meanings from the significant statements. Afterward, themes that reflected a particular DMM concept were incorporated together to form a distinctive construct of the theme. All these themes were internally convergent and externally divergent, meaning that each formulated meaning fell only in one theme that was distinguished in meaning from other structures (Creswell, 2009; Mason, 2002). Later, the researcher checked the accuracy of the overall results with assistance from the faculty member. Eleven themes emerged, which were grouped later into six related themes.

Step five. The themes at this point were defined by overarching themes, allowing the researcher to extract all necessary data regarding the relational experience of fathers and their children. The assistance of the experienced qualitative researcher was sought again, resulting in a review of the findings in terms of richness and completeness. This aid provided sufficient description and confirmed that the exhaustive description reflected the relational experiences of fathers with their children.

Step six. In this step, a reduction of findings was conducted in which redundant or overestimated descriptions were removed from the overall structure. The relationships were clarified in relation to the extracted themes through the removal of unclear information. The information was clarified using the DMM theory as a guide.

Step seven. This step was aimed at validating the findings of the study using the member-checking technique. Member checking was undertaken through the return of the research findings to participants and a discussion of the results with them. The researcher contacted 5 of the 10 participants to schedule 1 hour sessions to review the notes and transcripts for accuracy. Participants' opinions on the study results were obtained through face-to-face visits and phone calls. All five participants who were contacted expressed their satisfaction with the results, which they concurred reflected their feelings and experiences.

Demonstrating trustworthiness in the study findings. A number of strategies were employed to add rigor to the study including member checking, which was achieved by obtaining agreement from the participants on the merged results (Creswell, 2009; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). In an effort to establish credibility, the researcher reflected upon the research question and his own biases when developing themes and depicting the experiences the fathers described using bracketing. As mentioned previously, bracketing is an attempt to illuminate bias inherent in the researcher's beliefs and attitudes (Creswell, 2009). An audit trail was created and maintained throughout the progression of the study; this incorporated the literature review, research question development, theory and method selection, the IRB process, data gathering events, reflexivity writings, coding procedures, transcription, and data analysis (Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014). According to Creswell (2009), this allowed for a review of the whole process

of the study and provided an additional checking of the coding and data analysis process, which indicated the reliability of the process.

The researcher was aware of potential bias because of his personal, clinical, and educational experiences surrounding this topic area. For example, from the reflexive statement, the researcher described how he expected to hear fathers discuss themes about if and how being a father meets their expectations and the economic strain of having a child. As the researcher analyzed the data, if a father made any significant statements regarding any of these items, the researcher would make a reflexive memo to refer to later to examine potential places for bias. Rather than placing a label on the emerging theme, the researcher recognized the bias and returned to the participant's words to attempt to improve the accuracy of the phenomenon being described. Finally, data analysis was supported through the use of a Michigan State University faculty member and peer debriefing. The faculty member reviewed the findings in terms of fullness and comprehensiveness to provide sufficient description and confirmation that the exhaustive description reflected the relational experiences of fathers with their children within the DMM theoretical framework.

Results

The researcher initiated the data analysis procedure following the tenth interview and then remained in contact with the faculty member after transcription and initial analysis were completed. After the tenth interview, no new themes were developed and so the researcher and faculty member decided saturation within the themes had been achieved. Meanings were inferred from significant statements and then grouped into themes (Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014). These themes lead the progression of a man becoming a father and the influence of this on his own personal development in this role. Five themes were developed from the significant

statements: (a) first moments, (b) first experiences, (c) preparation, (d) reflexive process, and (f) multiplicity.

Theme 1: First moments "First moments" represents the early moments that fathers shared initial interactions with their child. These first moments were very unique to the fathers, in that they shared how powerful it was for them to now be a father and at times was very emotionally overwhelming for them. Many of the fathers mentioned not knowing what to expect when having a child, while others would talk about how much they prepped before the birth. Many of these fathers expressed fear and excitement as these moments happened. Attachment behavior can be very new and powerful just as these fathers described their initial moments with their child. One father described how fearful he was with the initial moment of birth: "Initially it scared the heck out of me. I didn't realize that um…when babies came out they were quiet." Another father described the intensity of the moment of birth itself: "that was a moment in itself and it was extremely intense, and it was adrenaline filled and it was 1:30 in the morning. She was there, it was like a part of me was staring back and it was young."

The process of becoming a dyad was beginning, one of the first steps in developing an attachment relationship (Crittenden & Landini, 2011), was described by one father as just observing and learning about this new human being:

> She was delivered via C-section and my wife was put under and I was having some trouble with-with that. You know, just kind of adjusting to that and her body. So yeah, the first hour or so it was just Kaylin and I. And um, you know, just being able to sit and watch her, and you know, hold her while they're while they're coming in and you know wiping her down, doing the different tests and, you know, we're cutting the cord and all

that stuff. You know, I guess, that's what I remember. The first moments really, I mean—her first moments.

The first moments often left the fathers speechless, but prepared to engage: "And I went over there with—with her, to look at her. Her mother stayed behind and was in the hospital bed, so that was kinda the first moment holding her and being with her and it was, you know, like this white thing I had to, you know, protect and devote my life to."

These moments became emotional for fathers as described here: "I can just see her and uh…it is, just still unbelievably mind blowing that you know, that that's my daughter. And, jeez, (noise)…I didn't expect to get all choked up about this." Another father openly shared his emotion: "I cried at the birth and cried at certain… you know and often after we got home, um, which is something I would have completely avoided otherwise." There was also an uncertainty to the reality of being a father: "And I just remember…um… just this awe…disbelief that you know I'm not getting that that's our daughter, uh, and starting to well up tears, you know, in my eye, and then finally they were able to clean her up and I was able to go over and hold her um and as they were cleaning her up you know touch her and hold her hand. And uh, and just this disbelief had been going through my mind."

Within this theme a sub-category developed that spoke to an "ah-ha" moment that seemed to be occurring with the fathers during these first moments. These fathers described their first moments as an immediate emotional reaction that took them by surprise in that "ah-ha" I am a father. No amount of planning could prepare them for this as one father described: "I knew nine months that my wife was pregnant of course this experience would be happening, but uh… still just in awe of it. Wow. This is… our daughter." Other fathers described their "ah-ha" within the first few moments as this is my child right now right here: "well when he first came out,

literally the first few minutes, all I could think of was…like…'Oh my gosh, he's my son" and "I had the immediate "here's my boy" kind of moment."

Theme 2: First experiences "First Experiences" describe the next level of interaction that appeared to develop with the fathers. They initially shared moments with their children then developed deeper meaningful interactions that began to show the father as an enactor of some initial attachment behavior. Sometimes these first experiences were not what was expected as one father described:

> We didn't have the natural birth experience, which I don't think either of us were too upset about. I don't think we were too keen on having that specific experience. Which, I guess is pretty typical. But I stayed, pretty much 24/7 at the hospital with my wife, for the entire time they allowed us to stay at the hospital. Which we thought would be a little easier on us, keep things you know, trying to take care of priorities, right off the bat.

These first experiences involved many different scenarios that were normally a regular occurrence or social greeting that was now a new experience with their child. Another father described an interaction with his neighbors:

> some germs are good for ya, so we have a happy medium in that, (short pause) but some I catch some slack from, umm, like the uh, like the first day our neighbors are outside and they were like "They had their baby!" and I brought him out wrapped in a thin blanket and walked outside with him and was like "look, look at the baby!" and her mom was there and got kinda upset at me because it was too cold for that kinda of blanket, and so (medium pause) so some criticism there, but (indiscriminate) I figured he was warm enough, and that, but a couple mistakes.

In building from the first moments the first experiences took on a deeper meaning for fathers in that they began to describe how they were now externally being represented beyond themselves as one father described, "it's like this feeling you get, that you are really, a part of somebody else". Another father described how important it was for him to share these moments with his partner: "like telling Christie it's a boy and get to cut the cord and all this was just amazing." These fathers would go on to describe these moments as not only being shared with their child, but also involving close family members that impacted how they interacted with their child. This was described below:

> I'd never held a baby before our daughter was born, let alone change a diaper and I was planning on my wife teaching me a lot of that but then with the C-section she wasn't able to do that so I remember in the hospital room just kind of at first being overwhelmed that you know they say, "ok she's gotta have a diaper change." And I'm very thankful that my mother-in-law was there to say, "Ok, this is what you have to do." And then I was able to take a…almost a month off of work, but by the time I was going back to work my wife was having a difficult time physically and especially emotionally, so it was nice that we had family that could come and spend time with her while I was at work. It gave me that piece of mind that somebody was with her and helping her out.

Theme 3: Preparation "Preparation" described the many things that fathers did to prepare for the birth of their child. They talked about how this was something they looked forward to yet it produced a significant amount of anxiety prior to birth. As described above and reinforced in this theme, the fathers went in prepared and many things were reinforced through this preparation as one father described:

> But my wife and I did a lot to prepare us for the birth and for having a child and raising a child. Uh we do… my wife does this… she rips magazine articles out. She has this binder of articles, and before our daughter was born and then in the last couple weeks we started doing it again. And we'll both pick out an article and we'll read it and then we'll share that information with each other, and that's the last step, you know

The preparation often began early and was important to the fathers that they were involved with the mother in supporting her through the pregnancy leading up to birth. Some fathers stated it simply and were straightforward, in that it was an important piece to who he was: "me and my wife are both people who like to prepare." One father described the time it took to become prepared: "I feel like I prepared myself. You know, we had nine—or eight months, that my wife was pregnant, but also we had been trying for a period of time before that." This was echoed in the following statement: "we were having, issues conceiving, and it was such a long time ago that we wanted to start trying and that was a really long period and then we finally did conceive. So it wasn't a surprise or shock; we had time to adjust." One father talked about the lack of sleep in the first few weeks and referenced back to his preparation: "I was pretty much aware and prepared for that. But it definitely is challenging and I was thinking it would be." Another father talked about the importance of being prepared and taking the time off of work to make sure that you are there for your new family: "I think uh take as much time, you know especially for new fathers, um take as much time off from work as you can, especially in the beginning, um spend as much quality time with your new son or daughter, and uh take care of your wife. That's a very good experience."

Within this theme a sub-category developed that spoke to the "adaptation of the father". This took the preparation of not only the personal experiences one had growing up but the

preparation they had completed and put it into their relationships. Crittenden and Landini (2011) began to describe this as the cognitive discourse that can occur as you begin to enact your new role as a father. This will later develop into reflecting on what your experiences have been in developing your internal working model of what a father is and how you will enact that role. Adaptation of the father appeared to be a start to this process. Fathers knew their life had changed as one describes this adaptation to this change:

> easier ya I guess, the main thing I mean by easier is I thought that, ya know, there's a survival kit and so umm like attention, hungry, work… you just always have to be doing something, whatever, always entertaining, but really what it actually turns out to be, is umm, yea you're busy 'cause ya know he is eating every 2 hours and you gotta change his diapers in between then, and there always has to be someone with him, he likes to hang out just as much and really as long as your home with him, ya know, we can veg

Within this adaptation one father described how he had to adapt to a different role as a father than he had originally expected due to the unexpected birth process: "I think that unfortunately since my wife had the C-section the bonding experience for her wasn't what she expected and the recovery process you know in the hospital for a couple of days was much longer for her and much more intense than it would have been if it was a vaginal birth." In all fathers echoed a similar statement, in that as they adapted, they were doing the best they could with the preparation they had: "Just, try and do everything the best we can. Uh, my wife and I—my wife especially—she's had a little more time than I have to uh research things".

Theme 4: Reflexive Process "Reflexive process" is the beginning of the development of an internal working model of what a father is and how that father is trying to self-define himself as a father. An internal working model is described within the DMM and attachment theory as

development of mental representations that consist of expectations about the self, significant others, and the relationship between the two (Bowlby, 1969; Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Through reflexive processes, fathers appeared to begin to develop internal working models of what they believed a father should be, and related expectations. The process often began by focusing on the expectations as one father describes: "it's just the experience. I am, I haven't gone through before, so um, just try to take it all in, and uh, make sure you know, do it and raise them…you know, properly and strongly." This was supported by another father who talked about his lack of experience: "I never babysat or anything like that; I had very little experience. So, I didn't really have anything to compare it to say "Wow, this is really different from what I was expecting." Another father talked about future expectations: "just the other day we started putting his hand on it and so he's actually grabbing it and then he's kind of confused like, "I think I'm holding that. What's going on?" He hasn't reached out and grabbed it yet on his own, but we'll get there." In all the fathers seemed to reflexively contemplate how their life had now changed and what that change means: "I don't even remember what it was like before I had kids. You know, they say that it takes over your life and you'll never be the same again"

One father reflected on the perception of others on his expectations of being a father: "And it might be worse when we're around other people because then I think it reflects badly on me if they're acting out, you know, or misbehaving, and I don't want people saying, "What kind of…what kind of father's…he's letting his kids run around and do this…" so maybe I'm a little harder on them when other people are around, but I think in general I'm kind of a stickler for the rules." Fathers would talk about the prioritization of these roles and expectations in their own minds as one father describes: "father has to be the priority. He's gotta be…it's faith, mom and then him. And I think that is a good balance for it. It's a lot of fun." Another father talked about

how he would like to be perceived in this role: “I would like to think that they see that I am involved. That I definitely prioritize and try to help out as much as I can. And that, that they would characterize me as a loving father.”

The varied reflective processing of the internal working model also showed fathers reflecting back on themselves the impact of love on the internal working model: “I didn’t know how quickly I could fall in love. And getting to meet them right away it’s just like instant. And here’s this person you care about just about as much as anything in the world, you know? And it’s been great, it’s, it’s…tangible love.” There was also a need to maintain a sense of self within this relationship: “one thing that I always try to make sure that I do is budget time for myself. You know, as much as I like spending time with Kaylin, there’s those days where I want adult conversation or I want to do adult things.”

Theme 5: Multiplicity “Multiplicity” is the variety of internal and external processes that were taking place around the varied perceptions of what a father is and the many parts that influence this internal working model. This theme moves beyond the reflexive process as it begins to show how fathers put the variety of perceptions of being a father into action. This theme built off of the previous themes as the father was now an enactor of their role and an important part of the developing attachment relationship. Cognitive discourse around the varied influences and expectations of being a man and a father emerged:

> I would say…as earlier…I think being a father is being a man. Being a father is a very important part of your life and a great responsibility and having that responsibility is very manly. You know its financially supporting the family, traditionally one of the masculine roles. So I don’t think I am a person that shows a lot of emotion but I don’t really try to hold it back. It’s just not my nature, but when I am with my children I don’t really hold it

back because it's not a big deal. Loving your children and showing emotion should be considered a manly thing.

Fathers also began to move beyond the excitement and initial reactions in those first moments and first experiences to show this is difficult and stressful as the fathers begin to balance the multiplicity of this new role: "I think being a father makes me a better man. There are times that are stressful as a father and you have to be tough to get through it." The combination of the multiple external and internal processing and the reality produced a sense of pride in the fathers as described by one father: "Now I'm at home taking care of a child. It seems a lot more productive, and its first priority no matter what. And it's something you can really be proud of, and people look up to you and are proud." This sense of pride led to an emerging sub theme within multiplicity that spoke to the "projection of who I am and who I want to be as a father." This was both internally driven and externally motivated showing the development and complexity the internal working model can take within the first year of life. Simple sentences emerged as fathers described who they are and who they wanted to be and how they plan to get there:

"There's just something that drives you from the inside."

"Give her the best tools to succeed and fulfill what she wants to do in this life."

"To really work hard with the time that I am given."

"Get things moving in the right direction."

As the fathers described above, the right direction may be driven by internal or external factors but the output is still the same, as this father sums up the overall analysis simply and in a straightforward manner: "that the most important job as a man I have, is to be your father."

Discussion

The 10 fathers interviewed for this research described their relationship experiences with their children. All 10 fathers are represented in the analysis and are a part of the thematic presentation. They help their children grow and are active in their own ways with their children. These early interactions are the beginning of the attachment relationship as fathers are becoming the enactors within the attachment relationship. All of these fathers mentioned being actively engaged with their children, which evidenced predictable selection bias. This selection of playful, interactive, and engaged fathers, was possibly caused by the referral process. This biased sample may have occurred because the male participants referred friends and colleagues whom they assumed would enjoy participating in the study. This assumption was made because, in order to be participants in the study, fathers were required to be engaged in the father-child relationship.

This commitment and aspiration to be a good father are delicately balanced with the father's own personal reflection on what their new role entails and what the future of this new role may be. In other words, these fathers have a desire to help their children succeed in life, but sometimes there appears to be an internal struggle of finding out who they are and balancing the multiple sources of information they are processing internally and externally. For some fathers, this means balancing that prior definition of self with the new emerging definition of self that includes their new child.

The 10 fathers who participated in this research described their relationship through the following themes: "first moments," "first experiences," "preparation," "reflexive process," and "multiplicity," however, not all of the themes were directly about the father–child relationship. The last two themes ("reflexive process" and "multiplicity") were related to the fathers'

individual processes of their developing internal working model. The internal working model begins to shape the expectations of their relationship with their children. These expectations help shape the interactions that fathers begin to have with their children. The interactions in turn lead to the development of the attachment relationship. In the very early stages of this relationship the father is the enactor of this relationship and driving the attachment relationship forward. The internal working model at this stage represents the ways in which reciprocal interaction with their child facilitates the reflective processing in becoming a father. These are the beginnings of the attachment process. The father is moving the process forward by beginning to see himself as a parent and becoming a driver and initiator of interaction in the relationship. Without the drive to interact with their child, the attachment relationship may be negatively impacted. The DMM model implies that internal working models provide a framework for beginning interactions within relationships. Having a negative relational experience early in life may negatively impact a man's sense of becoming a father, and, therefore, strain his developing relationship with his child.

Nevertheless, the findings of the current study align with Knoester, Petts and Eggebeen (2007) regarding the essence of father–child interaction being the sensitivity of one another to each person's signals. Fathers who become more social-psychologically committed to fathering are involved in their children's lives and are more likely to experience positive changes in their own well-being than fathers who become less committed to fathering over time (Knoester, Petts, & Eggebeen, 2007). The fathers in this study were in tune with questioning their new role as a father within the broader context of being a man and a father. Featherstone (2006) asserted that our society produces men and fathers, as well as women and mothers, through language and lived interactions with others. The fathers interviewed for this study stated that being involved

with their children was an important responsibility; being able to obtain balance, patience, and time with their children was a sense of accomplishment.

A limitation of the current study is that all of the children and fathers were Caucasian. Future studies should include fathers and children who have different racial and cultural backgrounds. Also, although the phenomenological approach allowed for in-depth interpretation of the data, it is necessary for the researcher to take into account that the presence of the audio recorder could have impacted the fathers' interpretation of their relationships with their children (Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014; Riessman, 1993). Expanding the sample size, and including step-fathers and non-custodial fathers could facilitate further exploration and comparison of how fathers describe their relationship with their children.

Implications for Research

Despite the fact that the findings cannot be generalized across societal or cultural contexts, the findings of this study reveal potentially useful information about the interactions fathers have with their children. These findings also indicate the need for further research involving father-child interaction and the meanings fathers ascribe to these interactions. More specifically, research should investigate the ways in which interactional behaviors of fathers and their children predict positive attachment relationships, how uninvolved fathers can become more involved, and how individuals with negative internal working models of fatherhood would describe their involvement.

Pleck and Masciardrelli (2004) found that father involvement had a positive impact on the developing child. Exactly what counts as positive impact, depends on the theoretical framework utilized and the outcomes that are measured. From the perspective of this research, positive interactions include those which are likely to promote positive attachment behaviors in a

broad sense, such as warm, responsive, and sensitive interaction; monitoring and guiding arousal; spending time listening and talking to children about concerns and successes; encouraging developmentally appropriate independent action; and caring for the child's physiological needs. An important point made by many researchers is summarized below:

> Father involvement cannot be separated from the network of family relationships within which it is embedded. The couple relationship is a key one, setting the scene against which parents negotiate and balance their family and employment roles and responsibilities. Research has suggested that high paternal involvement is grounded in a harmonious couple relationship (as cited in Featherstone, 2006; O'Brien, 2005, p. 9).

Implications for Social Work Practice

Indeed, it is important for social workers to notice the dangers of abstracting father-child interaction from the overall relationship context in which they operate. The data reviewed throughout this paper have highlighted the importance of locating father involvement contextually. These themes ("first moments," "first experiences," "preparation," "reflexive process," and "multiplicity") illustrate how this sample of fathers approached their relationship with their children. The resources that fathers bring to their new role may be their own past experiences, skills they have developed, and their own expectations. Social support can be a significant resource for fathers as they transition into their new role responsibilities. By reflecting on these themes, social workers can approach with an awareness of the discourse that may be going on inside fathers' minds. Certain fathers in this study described how critical their spouses' contributions were to their child and to the family, and therefore they offered support through increased involvement in domestic tasks. The results also indicated that the fathers were able to support their families through employment; however, the fathers did not talk much about

the support they received from the workplace. When the fathers who were interviewed were asked about support for themselves, they reported that only a few individuals provided them with social support and, most commonly, they gained support from their spouse. Many of the fathers reported that they had not asked about, nor had they been offered, appropriate support from professionals.

Social workers can also help fathers to attend to their relationships with their children by helping them find time to spend alone with their children and begin to interact with their child to gain reciprocal reinforcement for their behaviors. Additionally, fathers might not feel in such a state of flux if clinicians can help them find ways to meet other fathers who have young children. The opportunity for fathers to share their experiences with others could potentially validate the feelings and emotions fathers are experiencing.

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CHAPTER 3

Expressions of Affection in the Father-Child Relationship

Scholarship on fathering has aligned around the notion that fathering is multidimensional and relies on the context in which the interaction of the father and child occurs (Floyd & Morman, 2006; Parke & Swain, 1980). There has been a movement of effort to integrate research on fathering and identify the key concepts of fathering and how these concepts influence the attachment behaviors of fathers in their interactions with their children (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Lamb, 1997; Levine & Pitt, 1995; Marsiglio, 1995; Palkovitz, 1997; Parke, 1996; Pleck, 1997). One of the most important components of fathering involves affection, which refers to the way that the father displays his emotions about his child to his child. The previous chapter described how a father expressed these emotions in the first moments and first experiences with his child. This chapter aims to move the relationship forward to focus on affection and how the father is able to recognize these interactional signs, respond to them, and initiate his own affectional behaviors. This chapter builds on the previous one in that it further expands on the developing relationship between father and child discussed in Chapter 2 by reinforcing the attachment relationship through describing the affection within the father-child interaction.

Therefore, few interactive behaviors may carry greater importance for the development, maintenance, and satisfaction of father-child attachment than reciprocal affection (Floyd & Morman, 1998, 2006). Indeed, it is often through the expression of affectionate gestures that relationship progress is gauged (Booth-Butterfield & Trotta, 1994; King & Christensen, 1983; Owen, 1987). The absence of reciprocal affection may likewise signal relational deterioration, discontent, or disinterest in further interpersonal interaction (Hess, 2003). Several investigations have indicated that the sharing of affection is related to intimacy and satisfaction in father–child

relationships (Floyd & Morman, 2000, 2006). For some time, the significance of affection in relational interaction has been recognized by social workers. For example, Rotter, Chance, and Phares (1972) identified "affection" as one of six fundamental human needs (p. 12). Frank (1973) and Koch (1959) further emphasized the "importance of affection in therapeutic interventions" (p. 7), and others have indicated that affection plays a crucial role in developing internal working models (e.g., Bowlby, 1969).

A second component in early father attachment relationships is that of relational synchrony within the father-child dyad. Miller (2011) characterized early father involvement as a socially constructed performance "set in a complex of changing expectations and norms of behavior" (p. 176), and Dermott (2008) proposed intimacy as a way of conceptualizing contemporary fatherhood as a "relationship that allows for an emphasis on the aspects of male parenting, which fathers themselves view as most significant: emotions, the expression of affection, and the exclusivity of the reciprocal father–child dyad" (p. 143). For Dermott, intimacy can bridge the asynchronicity (Rotundo, 1985) between fathering culture and conduct, providing a scope for moving "beyond narrow formulations of fathers, either as failing to contribute to, or as sidelined from, family life" (Dermott, 2008, p. 143). Fathers are often capable of sharing deep connections with their children and often discuss this when asked. This chapter aims to explore this description of shared affection and how it begins to shape the early attachment relationship. The researcher intended to capture this connection between affection and early attachment by allowing the fathers to share, in their own words, what affection looks like to them.

Research Question

In the current paper, the researcher examined how father-child affection is shared by asking the question: How do fathers reciprocally share affection with their children? The interview questions involve discovering how fathers share affection and what interactional signs develop that enhance the attachment relationship. The DMM recognizes seven interactional items in early infancy that promote the development of a successful attachment relationship. The seven interactional behavior items are (a) facial expression, (b) vocal expression, (c) position and body contact, (d) expression of affection, (e) pacing of turns, (f) control, and (g) choice of activity (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The research question was aimed to begin the exploration as to how fathers reciprocally share affection with their children, through the methodology described in the following section. Through this investigation other interactional items are discussed as they complement the expression of affection.

Methods

In order to answer the research question, a phenomenological method of inquiry was applied. Phenomenology is utilized to seek rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences and is designed to protect and integrate subjective experience by allowing the construction of shared meanings and common understandings (Moran, 2000). For example, at the moment when the participant is describing or self-interpreting being, the researcher holds a phenomenological stance—keeping himself or herself open to that lived experience of the participant "in its wholeness" (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 18). This approach improves the ability of a researcher to uncover the human interactions that take place by adding new perspectives that broaden knowledge of the phenomenon (Sadala & Adorno, 2002, p. 18).

Through this researcher's own experiences as a father and a son, as well as his clinical and teaching experiences, he has lived experiences of being a father and working with fathers. He made an effort to understand the meaning of being a father, parenting a young child, and the emotions men experience during that time. Therefore, through the research topic, the questions used to address the phenomenon of a father's relational experiences with his child, and the tradition of social science philosophy, this researcher was able to uncover the experiences sought for this study.

Thus, the primary undertaking of this study was to understand participants' experiences in a new way—questioning the narrative, holding open the all possibilities, and letting the phenomenon show through the narrative (Moran, 2000; Patton, 2002). Each of these narrative accounts was read and reread by two researchers in order to perceive the shared meanings of a phenomenon. Therefore, this researcher "determine[d] the categories [themes], relationships and assumptions that inform[ed] the respondent's view of the world in general and of the topic in particular" (Basit, 2003, p. 143), while describing what "participants had in common (patterns) and bringing to light new understandings of these parents' experiences" (Creswell, 2009, p. 112).

The DMM guided this methodology allowing the researcher to apply the theoretical framework in the analysis. The DMM conceptualizes development and identifies distortions in the mental processing of information, specifically information relevant to feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Crittenden & Landini, 2011, p. 24). Attachment is seen in the DMM not as a stable property but as a strategy, mostly used unconsciously to attempt to keep safe within relationships and produce the next generation (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Genetic factors are recognized, yet the individual can only be understood within his or her relational–cultural context (Pocock, 2010). The DMM is developmental in that the availability of new experiences in ever-expanding,

relational–cultural contexts allow for an increasing range of strategies used over one's lifetime (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Pocock, 2010). In addition, the researcher used the themes as ways to show fathers' understanding in what they do and demonstrate how that understanding affects their children, as well as themselves, in a dynamic interactional approach.

Participants

After the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, the same 10 participants as the previous chapter were used in the study. The inclusion criteria for this study were (1) that the participant was the biological father of a child age 0 to 1, and (2) the father had to live with their child from birth to the date of the interview.

The researcher decided that biological fathers provided a starting point on which future research could build, for the following reasons. Biological fathers who lived with their children were chosen as a foundation to shape future expansions of this research by having the potential for more interactive opportunities with their child. The researcher chose to include fathers with children between 0 and 1 year old to capture the early interactions of the father with his young child. Finally, the researcher chose to select participants who had had lived with their children so the fathers could reference relational events.

Participants were chosen by convenience and availability for the study. The sample was selected purposefully from among fathers from the state of Michigan who had a child no older than 1 year. The sample was obtained from extended family and friends of faculty contacts and university programs focused on families at a Christian institution. This expanded the snowball sample into the community outside of the institution. A recruitment email was sent to solicit participants who fit the inclusion criteria, and it requested a response from the potential participants via e-mail or phone. After participants replied, the researcher called or e-mailed the

prospective participants to explain the study and verify that all of the inclusion criteria were met. The researcher scheduled interviews with participants at locations of their own choosing. Ten fathers participated in this research study, and all were Caucasian males. The fathers were also all employed outside of the home and between the ages of 18 and 38.

Three acquaintances of the researcher were also approached, and each agreed to be a study participant. Contacts for successive interviews were gathered from each previous participant to give access to a larger number of fathers. An appropriate sample size for this type of phenomenological study "ranges from 5 to 25 participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 72). However, the central issue is not the size of the sample, but rather "the quality of the text and the way that the lines of inquiry are reshaped by the participants" (Benner, 1994, p. 107). The sample size is sufficiently large when commonalities begin to be repeated among participants, a situation often referred to as saturation (Patton, 2002). Rather than focusing on the size of the sample, researchers are encouraged to stop data collection when it becomes counterproductive and when new data do not add to the overall study. As the analysis begins to take shape, researchers need to be willing to remove data where necessary (Mason, 2010).

Data Collection Procedures

All procedures were reviewed and approved by the IRB of Michigan State University. After a participant was selected to be a part of the sample, an interview was arranged. Interviews began with a brief overview of the study and a complete review of the consent process. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions before proceeding. Interviews were digitally audio-recorded. The researcher took extensive notes on both content and process as each participant responded. To maximize narrative accuracy, the researcher transcribed each interview. Reflexive thoughts and comments were written in a journal upon completion of each

interview and revisited during coding. Information logs and an audit trail were maintained throughout the interviews, transcription, and coding processes.

The interviews, lasting from 1 to 1 1/2 hours, were completed in quiet, private locations (either at a university office or the participant's home). The location was designated by the participant and confirmed by the researcher to maximize confidentiality and privacy. The researcher conducted all 10 interviews, transcribed each interview, and hand-coded the data; he was the only person with access to all information and records. A faculty member, who is trained in qualitative methodology, reviewed the transcripts with the researcher to confirm the analysis completed by the researcher.

To address the deficit in knowledge about fathers' shared affection with their children, a semi-structured, in-depth, phenomenological interview was chosen. A semi-structured interview form adapted from Fitton and Mooradian (2008) was utilized to target the affectional experiences between father and child in a DMM of attachment context. Using phenomenological methods allows the researcher to explore and then describe the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions, adapted from Fitton & Mooradian (2008) and Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, (2014), prior to the interviews were:

- How do you and your child show affection to each other?

  Probes:

  - Do you show affection in the same ways?
  - Are your affectionate gestures more physical or more verbal, e.g., pet names?

- How do you and your child communicate with each other?

  Probes:

        - What kinds of language do you use?
        - What kinds of non-verbal cues exist between you?
    - What else would you like people to know about your experience with your child?
    - What about _____ (the child)? Can you tell when (s)he is feeling affectionate and loving? Can you tell the subtle signs? Tell me what that is like.
    - Can you give me a recent or vivid example of one time that _____ (child) was feeling loving and affectionate?

      Probes:
        - What happened, what did s/he do, and how did you respond?
        - How do you respond to _____ (child's) affection and love?
        - What might you do?
    - What does your child's affection and loving behavior bring out in you?
    - In general, what are your reactions, thoughts, and feelings about _____ (child's) affection and love?

Analysis

Reflexivity. The researcher accepts the premise favored by qualitative researchers that states it is impossible to separate researchers from their research or for them to be neutral or unbiased (Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014); it becomes all the more important for researchers to be honest about their histories and reflect upon how that might influence the research (Daly, 2007, p. 186). Daly (2007) defined reflexivity as "the ways in which a researcher critically monitors and understands the role of the self in the research endeavor" (p. 188). For this

research, before beginning and during the process of data analysis, the researcher explored his biases, values, and knowledge of the topic. The researcher assessed his understandings and positioning in creating the following statement of reflexivity.

The researcher, Terry Keller. When considering the reasons for entering the social work field, it is important to understand my background. I grew up in a very rural community with limited resources. Very few individuals in that community continued on to college. Further, my childhood sensitized me to issues of limited father involvement, and being a father of young daughters impacts how I approach my work in the field of attachment and fatherhood, as my father was involved in a limited way.

I completed my master's in social work and another in business administration in St. Louis, Missouri, while working with both urban and rural families. After completing my training, I became a fully licensed social worker at both the clinical and macro level. I am also a member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers. I have worked with numerous families and seen them struggle to make ends meet and come out on top. I have also seen the downside of the limited engagement from parents and the detrimental effect it can have on children. I maintain a strong interest in the early childhood years and father involvement, especially for children who are under five years of age. Children within this age range are developing at a rapid rate biologically, psychologically, and socially. My daughters are in this age range, and when I see their interactions with peers, parents, teachers, and friends, it fuels my interest in their developing interpretation of the world around them.

In this research, I expected to hear fathers describe whether and how being a father meets their expectations; I anticipated there would be a large number of fathers who talked about the stress and financial strain having a child brings. I also wondered, as I progressed through this

project, about the significance of the father–child relationship that developed and how the strength of that relationship is shown outside of the home. I have questioned whether there can be a universal definition of fatherhood or father involvement, and I was curious how these fathers would describe their experiences and what it means to become a father. I tend to think that any definition in this area would have to be a very personal one that is based on unique experiences shared with one's children that is ever evolving in this relationship context.

Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis. Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis provided the structure for data analysis. To address the deficit in knowledge about fathers' relational experiences with their children, a semi-structured, in-depth, phenomenological interview was chosen. This method was considered the best way to expand the understanding of what men hold to be true about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as demonstrated in their relationship experience with their young child. The following steps were taken to represent Colaizzi's (1978) process for phenomenological data analysis (cited in Sosha, 2012, p.33; Sanders, 2003; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

1. Each transcript was read and reread in order to obtain a general sense of the whole content.
2. For each transcript, significant statements pertaining to the phenomenon under the study were extracted. These statements were recorded on a separate sheet, noting their pages and line numbers.
3. Meanings were formulated from these significant statements.
4. The formulated meanings were then sorted into categories and themes.
5. The findings of the study were integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under the study.

6. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon was described.
7. Finally, validation of the findings was sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Step one. Each transcript was read several times to gain a sense of the whole content. During this stage, any thoughts, feelings, and ideas that had arisen due to this researcher's previous work with fathers and the DMM were added to the bracketing memo. This helped to explore the phenomenon as experienced by the participants themselves.

Step two. In this stage of the analysis, significant statements and phrases pertaining to the fathers' affectional experiences with their children were extracted from each transcript. These statements were put in a Word document table. After extracting the significant statements from the transcripts, a faculty member trained in qualitative methodology and this researcher worked through the significant statements aligning them with DMM theory. From the 10 verbatim transcripts, the researcher identified over 200 significant statements.

Step three. Meanings tied to DMM theory were formulated from the significant statements. Each underlying meaning was coded in one category as being reflective of a specific DMM concept. In the same way, the faculty member and this researcher compared the initial meaning with the DMM concept in order to maintain the consistency of descriptions. However, minimal differences were found between the faculty member and this researcher. Both discussed the DMM theory at length prior to exploring meanings. This means that the statements and individual meanings were double-checked by a second researcher to ensure the validity and reliability of the process, as well as the accuracy of the meanings.

Step four. After reaching agreement on all formulated meanings, the process of grouping all these formulated meanings into categories that reflected the themes occurred. Each theme was

coded to include all formulated meanings from the significant statements. Afterward, themes that reflected a particular DMM concept were incorporated together to form a distinctive construct of the theme. All these themes were internally convergent and externally divergent, meaning that each formulated meaning fell only in one theme that was distinguished in meaning from other structures (Creswell, 2009; Mason, 2002). Later, the researcher checked the accuracy of the overall results with assistance from the faculty member. Ten themes emerged, which were grouped later into four related themes.

Step five. The themes at this point were defined by overarching themes, allowing the researcher to extract all necessary data regarding the affectional experience of fathers and their children. The assistance of the experienced qualitative researcher was sought again, resulting in a review of the findings in terms of richness and completeness to provide a sufficient description and to confirm that the exhaustive description reflected the relational experiences of fathers with their children within the DMM context.

Step six. In this step, a reduction of findings was conducted in which redundant or overestimated descriptions were removed from the overall structure. The relationships were clarified in relation to the extracted themes through the removal of unclear information. The information was clarified using the DMM theory as a guide.

Step seven. This step was aimed at validating the findings of the study using the member checking technique. Member checking was undertaken through the return of the research findings to participants and a discussion of the results with them. The researcher contacted 5 of the 10 participants to schedule 1 hour to review the notes and transcripts for accuracy. Participants' opinions on the study results were obtained through face-to-face visits and phone

calls. All five participants who were contacted expressed their satisfaction with the results, which they concurred reflected their feelings and experiences.

Demonstrating trustworthiness in the study findings. A number of strategies were employed to add rigor to the study including member checking, which was achieved by obtaining agreement from the participants on the merged results (Creswell, 2009; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). In an effort to establish credibility, the researcher reflected upon the research question, and his own biases, when developing themes and depicting the experiences the fathers described using bracketing. As mentioned previously, bracketing is an attempt to illuminate bias inherent in the researcher's beliefs and attitudes (Creswell, 2009). An audit trail was created and maintained throughout the progression of the study; this incorporated the literature review, research question development, theory and method selection, the IRB process, data gathering events, reflexivity writings, coding procedures, transcription, and data analysis. According to Creswell (2009), this allowed for a review of the whole process of the study and provided an additional checking of the coding and data analysis process, which indicated the reliability of the process.

The researcher was aware of potential bias because of his personal, clinical, and educational experiences surrounding this topic area. For example, from the reflexive statement, the researcher described how he expected to hear fathers discuss themes about if and how being a father meets their expectations and the economic strain of having a child. As the researcher analyzed the data, if a father made any significant statements regarding any of these items, the researcher would make a reflexive memo to refer to later to examine potential places for bias. Rather than placing a label on the emerging theme, the researcher recognized the bias and returned to the participant's words to attempt to improve the accuracy of the phenomenon being

described. Finally, data analysis was supported through the use of a Michigan State University faculty member and peer debriefing. The faculty member reviewed the findings in terms of fullness and comprehensiveness to provide sufficient description and confirmation that the exhaustive description reflected the affectional experiences of fathers with their children, within the DMM theoretical framework.

Results

The researcher began the data analysis procedure following the fourth interview and then after each subsequent interview. After the tenth interview, no new themes were developed and so the researcher decided saturation within the themes had been achieved. From the 10 verbatim transcripts, the researcher identified over 200 significant statements. Meanings were inferred from significant statements and then grouped into themes (Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014). Four themes were developed from the significant statements: (a) development of reciprocal interaction, (b) how each shows affection, (c) how they communicate, and (d) recognizing the subtle signs.

Theme 1: Development of reciprocal interaction "Development of reciprocal interaction" addresses the beginning of an attachment process. The previous chapter focused on the internal processing and the father's own inner workings in becoming a father, and the initial moments and experiences shared with his child. Development of reciprocal interaction centers on development of the father-child dyad. The father is no longer solely the driver of the relationship, he is in partnership now with his child. Here we begin to see a shift in the relationship where now the child is an enactor along with the father. One father shared when he noticed an appearance of intent to interact: "I think, he actually knows what he wants to say, but doesn't know how." Another father noticed the cues his child was giving in developing

reciprocal interaction: “Their eyes get bigger, they can tell. Sometimes they smile… the older ones, you know, they’ll smile. But it’s always a look of recognition, a look of comfort, that sort of thing.” The fathers would go on to say how they were looking forward to the next reciprocal interaction in what their next interaction may be as one father described: “he’s really cute, enjoyed being with him, and taking care of him and just waiting to see what he does next…ya know, like everybody else we are noticing everything little thing that he does so..”
Through the development of reciprocal interaction we see aspects of play start to emerge as the interaction has both a give and take as one father described with his daughter: “Well she has this lovable, little toy, that’s like an alligator-wagon thing. I dunno--it’s really colorful and it drags along the floor and plays music and what I do is I put these little blocks on and she’ll take em off. And she’ll put on, (phone rings) or I’ll put on and she just keeps taking them off and she never gets mad but she just keep doing it.”

Play is an important way for children to communicate and one of the early ways of assessing attachment behaviors (Crittenden, 2015). Through the developing reciprocal interaction, play was simple and often centered around affectional moments in sharing a smile and recognizing his father’s voice: “I think the biggest thing lately um is in the smiling and in the recognizing my voice when I walk into a room or I come home,” This connection is meaningful to the fathers and it appears to intensify as the reciprocal interaction changes and develops over time, as described by one father’s personal interpretation: “it’s this surreal connection um that is very difficult to describe and I think it’s an experience that defines the relationship’s connection that a lot of people don’t understand until you’re actually in that situation.” Fathers spoke about

how they were able to be playful with their child and when the reciprocity of the interaction grew the more excitement it brought out in the fathers:

> Well we'll play games you know making noises, making faces at each other, um, seeing if she'll mimic me. Um she's just within the last week starting to show interest in rattles and toys and stuff like that. For the last eight weeks we always bring them out and rattle and shake them in front of her but she hasn't shown much interest (inaudible) until last week but she'll first recognize it, smile at it, um you know holding it a little bit in her hand, learn how to walk, read a book, it will all happen fast.

The development of reciprocal interaction was also an important piece for fathers to show others, in that they hoped others would see how much they care for their child through the demonstration of these behaviors: "I think playful. You know, it just seems like we're always playing or I'm tickling her or she's crawling all over me or, you know, trying to get me to be the horsey or whatever. So that's how I say that you would describe it. I think the uh…I think the grandparents of Kaylin would say, I hope they would say "very caring". I hope they would see how important she is to me." As the child and father reciprocally interact, new things are introduced into the relationship and the father and child jointly navigate these new things together as one father described: "I love showing him things and introducing him to new things and trying to get him to say new words and pointing out stuff. And he'll point things out to me now at, you know, at his age, and say words that I had no idea he knew."

Development of reciprocal interaction was also described as a small, intimate, focused interaction where no words are needed to see the reciprocity in the description: "where the father's holding the daughter and she's looking up at him, he's looking down at her, and there's really not much else in the picture, it's just kind of focusing on that – the father and the daughter

um … (inaudible) about a bond relationship between them." In this interaction we are able to see the affectionate power a nonverbal gaze between father and child can have on the promotion of reciprocal interaction between the two. One father lightheartedly spoke of how sharing this intimate quiet time with his child not only relaxed him as his child went to sleep, but also he went to sleep himself: "They have this great ability to put you to sleep when you are rocking them to sleep (laughs). You know it's worth it, it's such a great experience. It's—you know, sometimes in stressful situations it's not ideal, but it's…it's really worth it." In bringing this theme to close, one father described the sense of developing that reciprocal interaction and how at the end of the day: "the best thing in the world is a baby sleeping on your chest."

Theme 2: How each shows affection "How each shows affection" builds off the previous theme of developing reciprocal interaction by focusing on the affectionate behaviors that are shared in the interaction. Fathers vividly shared their affectionate interactions by describing unique situations that were important to them. These situations reflected the expression of affection interactional item described earlier in measuring the quality of a relationship according to the DMM. This one item is only one piece of the overall relationship but often transitions into other behavioral items within the same interaction that can be measured according to DMM assessments. Affection often centers on touch and builds off the initial theme of reciprocal interaction as one father described:

> I give her kisses and stuff, and pick her up and hug her and swing her around and she laughs. But, I think when there is most affection is when I'm when I'm putting her to bed. She'll kind of like, she'll kind of like pet me. I think that that's, I think that that's like her

sign of affection for me, she'll kind of pet me. You know and I'll keep rocking her and sometimes lean the chair back and she'll kind of lay on my chest.

Closeness was important when describing how fathers showed affection. They often described their affectional behaviors in soothing conditions: "You know, I touch their face a lot, which, often because I get a reaction or a smile out of them. When I'm burping them and just holding them, I'm rubbing their backs a lot and I like to play with their legs and move their body around. Just really basic things like that. That's the extent I feel like I feel I can show emotion to them." The closeness continued to build off of reciprocal interaction, as described previously, and made it easy for fathers to describe how they show affection while expressing the mutuality of the interaction, as one father describes: "Love them and waking them up I feel I really connect. I feel it's very much a two way street. It feels very special, a lot of times in the morning they are in a really good mood. When I get home they are usually in a great mood as well. When I see them smile I hug them."

Affection appeared to go hand-in-hand with hugs. Hugs were often talked about throughout the interviews and were involved when fathers shared their descriptions of meaningful interactions from their perspectives. One father described the randomness of hugs at times, yet the meaning was just as powerful: "You know, when she comes over to me, I'll pick her up, and sometimes she'll just, put her head down and actually give me like some sort of hug, I guess. And then she'll go right back and be on the floor playing again." Fathers would go on to describe other events with hugs and would visibly show how proud, excited, and humbled they were when their children would hug them. One father described affection with his child simply, but with no less intensity or meaning, by saying: "Hugs. Big hugs." This was something that meant the world to him and was able to calm him down and put things in perspective.

Hugs were often combined with kisses. These affectional events often occurred around comings and goings of the day as fathers wanted to share their love for their child and when one was departing or separating from the other throughout the day. Kisses and hugs were combined often and frequently as one father described: "Once in a while she'll give me a kiss. But, that's usually if she's leaving or I'm leaving, whatever. Hugs definitely." Many of the fathers also expressed how sharing affection with their child is simple and did not need to be complex. "I think most commonly, for me, it's-it's just a kiss on the head with a big hug." Another father summed it up as: "I'll give her a big squeeze and tickle her, but that usually goes along with her big hugs."

Theme 3: How they communicate "How they communicate" focused on how the father-child dyad moves their relationship forward. These themes again build on reciprocal interaction and showing affection to movement toward a deeper interpersonal connection. The communication builds on the enhancement of not only verbal but nonverbal interactions to move the attachment relationship deeper. Emotions were being discussed and the impact of mood and how the communication within the dyad impacts the interaction, as one father described, when his son was not feeling well: "I am more inclined to get comfortable with him, ya know, I like him in my arms, um and not. So yeah I guess the way I do it most is just by proximity….just being close. And uh, rocking him, and rubbing his belly, because I think it makes it feel better." Communication also brought out a new side in some fathers who often described how they would do things to get a reaction out of their child: "And I find myself doing ridiculous things just to hear them laugh. Because…which…because I love the sound of them laughing. It's a great feeling." Fathers increased their communication by exploring games that got their child's attention. They worked to build upon what they knew worked with their children in previous

interactions to continue to evolve their relationship into a more advanced growing interaction that built upon the previous ones. One father described it as finding small games that the two of them can enjoy and knowing that he has their attention: "I like to do things, I like to play opposite games with them and I find, you know, that doing that gets their attention".

Theme 4: Recognizing subtle signs "Recognizing subtle signs" explored the father-child relationship further by focusing on enacting and engagement as a reciprocal piece that leads to synchrony within the relationship. Synchrony is a building block in assessing attachment and it begins with the participants being able to recognize the subtle signs within a relationship that can promote or inhibit the further development of that interaction (Crittenden, 2015). Often subtle signs can be missed and the synchrony or connection within the dyad suffers and can deteriorate over time if not addressed. When you enact and engage with your child the relationship becomes reciprocal in that mutual influence exists between father and child in further interactions. In the relationship development of a new father, part of the father's development is recognizing the subtle signs leading to synchrony. Fathers began to recognize the uniqueness in their children and how that was important to finding things they enjoyed and what interactions were successful, while also learning what things did not work in promoting their interaction with their child. One father described how his son is starting to recognize what he is about to do by past interactions: "It seems like he's recognizing and smiling and all those kinds of things. Get him moving around, and you know, like singing to him and stuff, pumping his legs back and forth, moving his arms around, getting him active and seeing the fun that he has with that." Fathers were also able to start to read and understand the subtle signs their kids were giving off: "moving her head from side to side, um you know I can tell if I set her down in her bassinette or in the cradle or something like that, if maybe she's gassy, she tries to flail her legs around kind of like she's

bicycling them". Reactions were what was important to fathers and often encouraged subtle behaviors by exploring the unknown or trying new things. Fathers then paid attention to these subtle signs to see if they would continue the behavior: "When you start getting a reaction out of them, you know, I don't know if they can feel tickling but they kind of coo and smile, or give a laugh. Just those sort of interactions are great."

One father described how he developed a secret hold that could calm his son when other means were exhausted: "I like to just bounce him to sleep in my secret hold that nobody else seems to master, which is ridiculously easy but just have him sleep in my hands, I like that, he could be very fussy, crying, hungry, upset stomach and everything and I rock him and he just gets comfortable, and his hands flop down and then he falls asleep, so it's just really cool to just, know that I am making him comfortable and uh, I really like when he uh, is starting to giggle a little bit," The subtle signs also enhanced and encouraged the interactional behaviors that were occurring by promoting a sense of gratification, as one father described: "I like to try to tickle him, or do something funny, and uh when I get a smile it is really gratifying, and it's one of the best feelings to make your kid smile."

Recognizing the subtle signs is not always easy, as one father said, it can take time and you have to be patient: "The look in the eye tells a lot and then when you are singing his arms will move and you can tell he is excited. You just have to look a little closer. When you are staring at him all day you tend to pick up on it." As the recognition of these subtle signs develop to more complex interactions, the child often appeared to respond to an expectation of the impending interaction as another father described: "then my wife and I would play a game where we'd both kiss his cheeks and make him bounce back and forth between the two of us. But um, yeah now he's kind of like, he's almost starting to lean into them." Subtle signs were present in

different aspects of daily functioning for the dyad and often caused moments of pause in the interaction to just enjoy the moment as this father described: “picking her up, bringing her into the nursery to change her and how she’ll just stare wide eyed at me. And that’s just the coolest thing.”

Discussion

The fathers who participated in this research spoke openly about affection and the interactions that occurred between themselves and their children, including the subtle signs that enhanced the interactions. In many cases, the fathers showed emotional reactions during the interviews that exhibited the importance of the reciprocal nature of the impact of affection. This is because speaking about the experiences had, thus far in fatherhood, provided evidence of the unique connection that exists with their child, showing that the child means everything to them. For all fathers interviewed, they were learning how to be a father from their child and their child was influencing how this development was being shaped. All 10 fathers are represented in the analysis and are a part of the thematic presentation. In the end, the fathers acted as they felt was most appropriate and recognized the subtle signs that reinforced or changed their behaviors in the interactions. In the previous chapter the father was the enactor, here in the chapter, we are able to see the child becoming the enactor in the relationship. The mutuality and reciprocity is cemented in the attachment relationship and brought together many of the interactional behavioral items that will lead to measurement of the quality of the interaction according to the DMM in the next chapter. Initiation and response from the infant as well as initiation and response from the father now are the guiding aspects of this developing father-child relationship.

The fathers participating in this study experienced shared affection through “development of reciprocal interaction”, “how each shows affection”, “how they communicate”, and

"recognizing the subtle signs". These themes suggested how connections were impacted between father and child. The seven interactional behavior items in the DMM of (a) facial expression, (b) vocal expression, (c) position and body contact, (d) expression of affection, (e) pacing of turns, (f) control, and (g) choice of activity (Crittenden & Landini, 2011) were discussed qualitatively within this paper. Nonetheless, the findings of the current study suggest that future research is needed in the interactions between father and child. Building upon this qualitative information in combination with the DMM assessment tools potentially opens a deeper understanding of the quality of the relationship between a father and his child. These fathers spoke of how often nonverbal cues from their young child would reinforce what they were doing. Crittenden and Landini (2011) discussed that interpersonal strategies to connect with others develop early on in life. Having the ability to understand one's own mental processes with regards to interpersonal interaction with their child can potentially break down barriers when it comes to connecting with their child.

Implications for Research and Social Work Practice

Through providing informational and emotional support for fathers, social workers can have a positive influence on the experience of fathers during periods of transition. For instance, following childbirth, fathers may be uncertain about how to interact with their child as this is very new to them. With this knowledge, social workers and healthcare professionals can be aware of these worries and fears, as well as encourage these fathers to look for the subtle signs that their children are giving that promote one interactional behavior but may be cause to change another. It may be useful for professionals to support these fathers by giving the fathers an opportunity to talk through these concerns and also combine this information with video and constructive feedback to show what affection is mutually reciprocated with their child while

another may be intrusive or cause distress. This is a delicate area and sensitivity is important in addressing any incongruity in the relationship.

Although the findings are not generalizable to all fathers in every context, the findings of this study uncover information about the affectional relationships fathers have with their children. Moreover, this study indicates the potential need for further research in the area of shared affection with fathers and their children in promoting the development of a healthy attachment relationship. More specifically, this study of shared affection of fathers with their children can represent an interesting area to pursue with fathers who are not emotionally or affectionately connected to their children, as the question remains as to whether this feeling or drive to emotionally or affectionately connect is still present. The resolving of this question may lead to an increased awareness of self in fathers that may be applied to why barriers exist when trying to connect with their children. Having the ability to describe the interactional behaviors that fathers are already using in their interpersonal relationships, outside of the immediate father–child interaction, can be empowering for a man in providing useful tools to be successful socially, which in turn could potentially translate to an improved relationship with their child (Crittenden & Landini, 2014).

A limitation of the current study, however, was that all of the children and fathers were Caucasian, and future studies should include fathers and children who have different racial and cultural backgrounds. Also, although the phenomenological approach allowed for in-depth interpretation of the data, it is necessary for the researcher to take into account that the presence of the audio recorder could have impacted the fathers' interpretation of their relationships with their children (Keller, Ramisch, & Carolan, 2014; Riessman, 1993). Expanding the sample size to include non-biological fathers, such as step-fathers or possibly fathers without custody, could

provide further analysis for comparison of how fathers describe the drive or lack of drive to affectionately connect with their child.

The transition to parenthood involves multiple members of a family. Hence, social workers and policymakers can make efforts to include fathers when providing treatment or creating policies. Social workers can first acknowledge a father's presence and involvement and engage him instead of focusing solely on one aspect of the family unit. Information specific to fathers can be given at various stages of this transition to their new role of being a father (for example, during pre-birth classes and childbirth), to prepare fathers for the unknown and reduce their anxiety around connecting with their child, an issue many fathers mentioned in this study. Additionally, conducting fathers-only groups would allow social workers and healthcare professionals to direct all their attention and resources to solely addressing fathers' needs and concerns in recognizing the early subtle signs and communicative techniques that work well in early childhood.

As for the fathers' specific interactions with their children, these findings provide an opportunity to celebrate the joys of being a father. Focusing on these interactions that are positive can provide a strengths-based opportunity to build and enhance the father-child relationship. Utilizing the DMM approach to attachment can build a feedback tool for assessing these interactions and providing opportunities for change. Understanding how fathers are mentally processing their interactions with their child is a key component of DMM assessment. Exploring both adaptive and maladaptive behaviors using this type of interview data in conjunction with other DMM assessments provides an improved picture of how the dyad is functioning. Allowing fathers to share their cherished interactions with their child, and with their current or future partners, potentially could open new channels of communication in that

relationship, thereby enhancing the overall environment in which a child is growing up. The sampled fathers all spoke about the positive interactions they had with their children, rarely if at all speaking of any negative interactions. Early intervention in negative relational experiences and early promotion of positive relational experiences builds a realistic future of how fathers can be successful in raising their children.

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CHAPTER 4

Assessing the Quality of the Father–Infant Interaction

This chapter focuses on the quality of fathers' interactions with their children based on the functionality of reciprocally interactive behaviors as assessed by the CARE-Index (Crittenden, 2008). Within father–child relationships, reciprocal interpersonal interaction influences father and child, as well as the generalized expectations each has of the other. It is through these experiences that meanings are made for the dyad, and quality interaction can encourage further interactive behaviors. In these early interactions, individuals can learn to regulate relationships in ways that promote the protection of the self and foster caregiving for children until maturity (Belsky, 2012; Bowlby, 1969; Crittenden, 1995). Crittenden and Landini (2015) argued, "All factors that are known to affect development and adaptation are active in attachment relationships" (p. 257). The DMM of attachment also addresses individual differences in relationship types (Crittenden, 2008) and the varied developmental pathways that produce these differences (Crittenden & Landini, 2015). Simply put, the interpretation of interpersonal interaction in attachment relationships is the basis not only for early adaptation within infant–parent attachment but also for later adaptation or maladaptation (Crittenden & Landini, 2015, p. 258).

Infants who are unable to change their state of arousal (e.g., when falling asleep or waking up) often have difficulty meeting survival needs (Crittenden & Landini, 2015). Infants, nevertheless, can produce behaviors that fathers can interpret and respond to in order to help infants change their levels of arousal (Crittenden & Landini, 2015). Such interactions between fathers and infants also facilitate infants' use of mutually influential information about the interaction to regulate themselves (Crittenden & Landini, 2015). When a father or other caregiver manages his child's arousal, that child is more likely to be safe, fed, and rested; when

infants are alert and in a state of moderate arousal, they can explore meaning-making interactions in response to a wide range of stimuli (Crittenden & Landini, 2015, p. 258). The ability to explore meaning making within these interactions is crucial to long-term adaptation within current and future father-child relationships (Crittenden, 2015; Crittenden & Landini, 2015; Kuhbandner et al., 2011; Sutherland & Mather, 2012).

Social workers can help fathers learn to recognize important internal and external signs within interactions, attribute helpful meanings to these signs, and organize adaptive responses that will improve parental functioning (Crittenden, 2015). This study serves to fill a gap in the existing research by providing more information on the patterning of father–child interactions within the zones of proximal development. To explore this focus, the present study entailed an investigation into the quality of the relationship between fathers and infants using Crittenden's (2007) Infant CARE-Index to answer the following research question: Which interactive patterns, as assessed by the Infant CARE-Index, are present in father–infant play within this sample?

The validity of the CARE-Index for measuring parent-child interactions is based on the findings of more than 40 studies. For example, Farnfield, Hautamaki, Norbech, and Sahhar (2010) concluded that the Infant CARE-Index is the best validated assessment of the DMM based on several studies. A longitudinal study by Kemppinen, Kumpulainen, Moilanen, Raita-Hasu, and Ebeling (2006) tested the validity of the Infant CARE-Index on 75 mother–child dyads over a two-year period and found that the index scores for maternal sensitivity correlated significantly over the two assessment points. In another study, Leadbeater, Bishop, and Raver (1996) evaluated adolescent Puerto Rican and American mothers and infants and found a significant correlation between problem behaviors in children and infant scores in the CARE-

Index, indicating the efficacy of the CARE-Index for high-risk groups in different ethnic contexts.

In addition, Crittenden, Claussen, and Kozlowska (2007) compared the CARE-Index to two other commonly used methods of assessing attachment in children: the Ainsworth model and the Cassidy–Marvin method. The researchers looked at four variables—namely, maltreatment status, child development competence, maternal attachment strategy, and maternal sensitivity measured by the CARE-Index. Crittenden, Claussen, and Kozlowska (2007) used the delta-prediction statistic developed by Hildebrand, Laing, and Rosenthal (1977) for categorical tests and the chi-square for more general tests.

The available literature has indicated that the CARE-Index is the most valid assessment of attachment for children age 0–15 months. This is significant because Kunster et al. (2010) concluded that the relation between maternal sensitivity (as measured by the index) and the child's attachment security (as measured by the Preschool Assessment of Attachment [PAA] method) supported the validity of the CARE-Index. Kunster et al. (2010) found a significant correlation between maternal sensitivity in the CARE-Index and child security of attachment in the PAA (which ranked attachment levels as secure, insecure, and very insecure). This finding was true with respect to the total samples of parent–child dyads (Kendall's rank correlation: r = .523, $p \leq .000$) as well as the referred (Kendall's rank correlation: r = .718, $p \leq .000$) and normative subsamples (Kendall's rank correlation: r = .400, $p \leq .002$; Kunster et al., 2000, p. 385). Chi-square analysis confirmed the concordance of the CARE-Index and the PAA ($x2$ = 20.795, p = .000) for the total sample as well as for both subsamples ($x2$ = 15.319, p = .004 for referred; $x2$ = 7.491, p = .024 for normative; Kunster et al., 2000, p. 385).

Often employed as an outcome measure in intervention research, the CARE-Index has been used to assess changes in mother–infant interaction following a video feedback intervention for severely depressed mothers (Kenny, Conroy, Pariante, Seneviratne, & Pawlby, 2013). In addition, studies on drug-exposed infants, mothers with psychiatric disorders, and maltreated infants have demonstrated that the CARE-Index can be used as an effective tool for intervention with high-risk populations (Farnfield et al., 2010; Kenny et al., 2013). To date, however, there are no published reports on the CARE-Index's reliability or validity in measuring interactions between fathers and infants.

Methods

Participants

The participants of the present study comprised 21 different fathers from the previous two chapters who were fluent in English and over 18 years old. The majority of the participants in the subsample (90.5%) were Caucasian and 95.4% were employed (67% worked full-time). At the time of recruitment, 80% of the fathers reported being married and 10% cohabited with the mothers of their children. The remaining 10% reported living with a partner other than the child's mother. All fathers lived with their children. Fathers (n = 21) were between 20 and 42 years of age (M = 32.10 years; SD = 6.93). Eighty-one percent of the fathers reported having a middle-income household, 10% reported having low income, and 10% reported living at poverty level. At the time of the study, the infants (10 girls and 11 boys) were between 1 month and 15 months of age (M = 9.62 months; SD = 3.89). Among the participants, 12 fathers reported having three or more children, four had two children, and five had only one child. All the fathers reported that they were actively engaged in childcare, including feeding, diaper changing, attending doctors' appointments, and providing nighttime care. The fathers also reported that

they spent less time than the mothers with their children but felt that the time they did spend with their children was fulfilling.

Data Collection Procedures

Research protocol approval was obtained from the institutional review boards of Michigan State University and Lourdes University. To begin the snowball sampling process, fathers were recruited through faculty contacts and family-focused programs at a Christian university in northern Ohio. Fathers who were interested in taking part (n= 21) were given information sheets, consent forms, and a demographic information form (see Appendix B). The researcher contacted the prospective fathers and verified that each met the Infant CARE-Index eligibility criterion of having a child of no more than 15 months of age. Then, a videotaped interaction between father and child was scheduled at a location agreed upon by the father. All the fathers who expressed interest met the eligibility requirements. Before the videotaped interaction occurred, the researcher met with the participating fathers to present a brief overview of the study and provide a complete review of the consent process. After the participants signed the consent forms and their basic demographic information was verified, the fathers received a brief introduction to the activity before the play interaction was videotaped.

The following procedure was adapted from the CARE-Index manual (Crittenden, 2007). The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants, who were assured of the confidentiality of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. The researched videotaped the interactions in participants' homes or an agreed upon location. Before the videotaping began, the researcher selected a suitable, well-lit place. External sounds were reduced, and a few age-appropriate toys and a baby blanket were supplied if requested.

Each father was specifically told, "Play with your baby as you usually would. You can use toys or not, as you choose. Sit so you are comfortable and don't worry about the camera" (Crittenden, 2007, p. 4). The videotaping commenced once the father sat down to play, and three minutes of parent–infant play were captured with a digital video recorder. Crittenden and Landini (2011) describes the three minutes at low stress to capture the best of their parental interaction in a low stress situation. After the interaction, the researcher discussed the experience with the participants.

As Crittenden recommended, two trained, reliable coders coded the taped interactions and separately scored each adult and infant for the seven aspects of interactional behavior. The seven interactional behavior items are (a) facial expression, (b) vocal expression, (c) body position and contact, (d) expression of affection, (e) pacing of turn taking (f) control, and (g) choice of activity. The coders viewed each recording at least three times, checking for signifier behaviors for each pattern, until they were satisfied that the scoring reflected the pattern of the interaction. The main coder, a research colleague who received only the videos, was blind to all other information about the fathers and their infants. To check reliability, the researcher also scored 25% of the video interactions. The intraclass correlation coefficient was used as a measure of coder agreement and showed good to excellent agreement (Bruton, Conway, & Holgate, 2000); the coefficients (two-way random, absolute agreement, single measure) were calculated as follows: .90 for parental sensitivity, .80 for parental unresponsiveness, .91 for parental control, .89 for child cooperation, .90 for child difficulty, .85 for child compulsivity, and .84 for child passivity.

Measures

This study used the Infant CARE-Index (Crittenden, 2007) to assess the quality of the relationship by exploring the interactional patterns between fathers and infants. The Infant CARE-Index was developed based on the recommendations of Crittenden (2007), who was working under the direction of Ainsworth and Bowlby. The Infant CARE-Index is a play-based system designed to categorize adult and infant patterns of interaction and assess the fit between attachment figure and child (Crittenden, 2007). The Infant CARE-Index is designed to encourage the coder to think in terms of dyadic patterns, in which the meaning of the behavior is structured on the interaction. The Infant CARE-Index allows for the use of the following sources of information (Crittenden, 2007):

- The observer's feelings
- The dyadic synchrony score
- Signifier behaviors
- Patterning

The categorization of adult and infant interaction patterns within the Infant CARE-Index is based on three minutes of videotaped, semi-structured play that ideally occurs under nonthreatening conditions (Crittenden, 2007). Because the procedure is focused on a short play interaction, sessions can be videotaped at home, in a research setting, or in an office. The tapes do not need to be a precise length, although they should be as close to three minutes as possible and should not exceed the length of interactions natural for the child being studied (Crittenden, 1981, 2008).

Assessment is based on the use of itemized judgments of functionally equivalent behaviors rather than frequency counts of specific behaviors. Each item in the index is utilized to

identify a pattern of behavior and provides one or more examples of the behavior. The CARE-Index coding procedure focuses observers' attention on the seven interactional items within the appropriate zone of proximal development in the play interaction (Crittenden, 2007). The issues in play interaction at various stages of proximal development are as follows:

1. Birth to 3 months: physiological regulation (Are the baby and parent able to physiologically regulate themselves?)
2. 3 to 6 months: turn-taking (Does the dyad take turns at an activity vocally, physically, etc.?)
3. 6 to 9 months: playing the game (Is there a game being played between the dyad?)
4. 9 to 12 months: reciprocal communication around an object of joint attention (Is the dyad able to attune jointly to one object?)
5. 12 to 15 months: incorporating language into play (Does the dyad incorporate language into their play?)

It is important to note that some of the interactional items involved affective characterizations (e.g., facial expressions, vocal expressions, body position and contact, expressions of affection), whereas others involved cognition, temporal order, and interpersonal contingency (e.g., pacing of turn taking, control of the activity, developmental appropriateness of the activity; Crittenden, 2007). The scores provided by the coders were summed to generate three pattern scores for the adults and four for the infants. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the affective characterizations were explored using a qualitative methodology, allowing a deeper exploration of their meanings for each father–child dyad.

The Infant CARE-Index allowed for the measurement of adult sensitivity as a characteristic of a specific dyad, rather than a specific person, based on the three minutes of

videotaped play interaction between the caregiver and the child (Kunster et al., 2010). Coding with the CARE-Index involved a pattern recognition task. The pattern outcomes were treated as the product of the adult–child relationship rather than the characteristics of either individual; in other words, the behavior items for each individual were scored from the perspective of the other (Crittenden, 2007, p.17). Each of the seven interactional items encompassed one sub-item that described each of the three adult patterns and one sub-item that described each of the four infant patterns (see Appendix A; Crittenden, 2007; Farnfield et al., 2010). The three patterns of adult codes were (a) sensitive, (b) controlling, and (c) unresponsive. The infant responses were coded in terms of four patterns of behavior: (a) cooperation, (b) compulsivity, (c) difficulty, and (d) passivity (Crittenden, 2007; Farnfield et al., 2010). Table 4-1 presents these lists organized by adult and infant pattern pairings. Sensitive patterns included adult behaviors that accommodated the infants' behaviors. Controlling patterns consisted of behaviors that were either overtly hostile (e.g., jerking or pulling on the infant's body) or covertly hostile (e.g., behaviors that appeared playful but were irritating to the infant). The unresponsive pattern comprised facial, vocal, and physical withdrawal of the child (Crittenden, 1981).

Table 4-1

CARE-Index Adult and Infant Patterns

Adult	Infant
Sensitive	Cooperative
Controlling	Compulsive
Unresponsive	Difficult
	Passive

In the Infant CARE-Index (scoring form shown in Appendix A), the construct of dyadic synchrony (interpreted here as the quality of the father–child interaction) was operationalized through a multipattern observational measure. This measure comprised seven interactional items (facial expression, vocal expression, body position and contact, expression of affection, pacing of turn taking, control, and choice of activity) that could be used to evaluate the quality of the father–child interaction (Crittenden, 2008).

According to the DMM, parent–infant patterns of interaction (in this case, paternal sensitivity and infant cooperation, paternal control and infant compliance, paternal unresponsivity and infant difficultness, and paternal unresponsivity and infant passivity) are formed partly on the basis of the infant's ability to organize coping strategies to adapt to the father's style of interaction (Crittenden, 2005). As discussed in previous chapters, the father has the ability to drive the relationship while the infant learns how to adapt and engage over time. Interactive patterns develop through continued reciprocal interactions between father and child, which allows for the establishment of expected behaviors on both sides. Crittenden and Landini (2011) stated that these types of infant behaviors (i.e., cooperation, compliance, difficultness, and passivity) are short-term adaptations to paternal behaviors. Paternal behaviors, in contrast, depend on individual, social, and cultural factors. Thus, the father's behavior is tied more strongly to long-term adaptations than to short-term safety measures (Crittenden & Landini, 2011).

Using the CARE-Index, the father–child relationship quality was assessed for both adults and infants in an interactive dyadic setting (Crittenden, 1981). The procedure involved asking the father to "play with your baby/toddler as you normally would" (Crittenden, 1981, p. 204). The interaction was videotaped for approximately three minutes, a period selected based on earlier

findings indicating that brief periods are useful in differentiating maternal sensitivity (Crittenden, 1981, 2007). Following the videotaping, the data were analyzed to measure the sensitivity of the father and the reactions of the infant.

The coding process involved making categorical judgments about the three adult patterns (sensitivity, control, and unresponsiveness) for each of the seven interactional items (facial expression, vocal expression, body position and contact, expression of affection, pacing of turns, control, and choice of activity). The father's behavior with respect to each of the seven items was assigned a value of 0 (mostly absent), 1 (present in conjunction with another behavioral pattern), or 2 (mostly present). Thus, a maximum of 14 points could be allocated among the three patterns (Crittenden, 1981, 2007). The same scoring process was applied to the four infant patterns for a maximum of 14 points across the same seven interactional items as the adult.

The scores on these items ranged from 0 to 14, with 0 representing dangerously insensitive, 7 representing normally sensitive, and 14 representing outstandingly sensitive. Category descriptions for interpreting these item scores are provided in Appendix C (Crittenden, 1981, 2007). The other patterns (i.e., control, unresponsiveness, cooperativeness, compulsiveness, difficultness, and passivity) showed the specific nature of the deviation away from sensitivity and cooperation (Crittenden, 2007). Approximate cut-off scores were obtained based on the dyadic synchrony scale, which summarized the father–infant relationship. The scores indicating mild risk (5–6) generally indicated the need for simple parent education or a short-term dyadic intervention around the father's own videotaped interaction with his infant. Scores of 3–4 generally indicated the need for parent–infant clinical intervention. Among scores in the lowest cluster (0–4, indicating high risk), scores of 2 or lower usually indicated adults who were unprepared to receive or benefit from intervention, such as parent education, for the sake of

their children. Stronger information can be derived from the patterning of the scores. Combinations of nonsensitive and noncooperative items were informative in terms of how each member of the dyad perceived the other. Thus, this study operationalized dyadic synchronicity as relationship quality through the use of the CARE-Index.

Results

When the results were coded and recorded, patterns emerged for the fathers and infants who participated in this study. Table 4-2 shows the means and standard deviations of the father–infant interaction scores. The sample population of fathers manifested all three interactive patterns, although the predominant behaviors were sensitive. Specifically, 8 participants scored as sensitive, 7 as controlling, and 6 as unresponsive. Among the infant participants, there were two main patterns, cooperative (8) and passive (6). The other two infant patterns—compulsive (4) and difficult (3)— manifested in less than 35% of the sample.

Table 4-2

Scores of Father–Infant Interaction

Pattern	*N*	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sensitive	8	7	5.33	2.129
Controlling	7	12	4.05	3.930
Unresponsive	6	10	4.81	3.326
Cooperative	8	8	5.29	2.411
Compulsive	4	9	1.38	2.974
Difficult	3	9	2.57	2.378
Passive	6	9	4.71	3.019
Valid *N* (listwise)	21			

Fathers who scored outside the appropriate zone of proximal development often did not interact dually with their children. In contrast, sensitive fathers who were interpersonally in tune with their children were responsive and focused on developmental play tasks within the zone of

proximal development. These fathers altered their interactions to match the arousal of the child by increasing affect or activity in response to the child's need for increased interaction. These fathers also used affective behaviors to calm very aroused children and encourage them to focus on the play task presented. For instance, in one video sequence, the following father–child interaction occurred: The baby gave a sign, which the father interpreted. In turn, the father created a sign that his baby did not perceive as relevant to the interaction. However, the baby sought the father's connected gaze by finding his father's eyes. The father interpreted this action to mean that his baby is ready to engage, and he opened his mouth. A few sequences of small nonverbal interactions occurred. At first, father and baby became increasingly attuned, and then the baby only gazed (but showed nonverbal enjoyment by smiling during the interaction). The father used words to signal he wanted action by saying the baby's name; when the baby only looked, the father abruptly kissed the baby. This breached the synchrony; the father had misinterpreted his sign (relaxed gazing) and, acting on this misinterpretation, has disrupted the social interaction. The father immediately interpreted his mild distress as uncomfortable for the baby and corrected the intrusion by adjusting the father's closeness and vocally reduced his arousal. The pair regained synchronization almost immediately.

Similar to previous work by Hautamäki et al. (2010), who used the CARE-Index to assess mothers, this study found that income level made no significant difference with regard to the least sensitive fathers and the least cooperative babies. Indeed, income level appeared to have no effect on the quality of the father–infant relationship. Among the groups participating in the present study, middle-income fathers were as sensitive and their infants as cooperative as those with a lower income status.

Table 4-3 shows the correspondence between risk categories and synchrony scores for fathers' interactions with their infants. The lower the synchrony score, the higher the risk that the dyad's action were out of sync. When interactive behaviors were misinterpreted in the dyad, there was a potential for the lack of synchrony to lead to maladaptive behaviors. Three minutes is also a short time to measure a potentially developing interaction and capture all interactional behaviors that may occur. Thirty-eight percent of the fathers scored in the at-risk level for incongruence or lack of reciprocal interpersonal interaction, and 29% scored in the inept range. The remaining 33% scored in the adequate range. No father in the study had a synchrony score over 9. This top-end synchrony score begins to raise the question of are the interactional items accurately measuring the quality of the dyadic interaction.

Table 4-3

Risk Categories and Synchrony Scores of Fathers' Interactions with their Infants

Risk Categories	Sync Score	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
At Risk	2	2	9.5	9.5	9.5
At Risk	3	1	4.8	4.8	14.3
At Risk	4	5	23.8	23.8	38.1
Mild Risk	5	3	14.3	14.3	52.4
Mild Risk	6	3	14.3	14.3	66.7
Adequate	7	3	14.3	14.3	81.0
Adequate	8	2	9.5	9.5	90.5
Adequate	9	2	9.5	9.5	100.0

Table 4-4 shows the correlations between the father's interactional patterns and those of the infant. These associations were examined using Spearman's (*rho*) ranked order correlations test. The primary adult patterns commonly associated with mothers based on Infant CARE-Index assessments (Crittenden, 2008) were also reflected in the fathers who participated in this study. Patterns that fell outside of these combinations were rare and often were due to coder error

(Crittenden, 2007). The following father–infant pattern combinations reflected mother–infant pairings found in previous studies (Crittenden, 2007; Hautamäki et al., 2010):

- Sensitive—Cooperative
- Controlling—Compulsive
- Unresponsive—Passive
- Unresponsive—Difficult
- Controlling—Difficult

Table 4-4

Correlations Between Father and Infant Interactional Patterns

Pattern Combination	Spearman's (*rho*)
Sensitive—Cooperative	.596**
Controlling—Compulsive	.608**
Unresponsive—Passive	.892**

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations existed for the following father–infant behavior pairings: sensitive and cooperative, controlling and compulsive, and unresponsive and passive. These correlations related to the patterning the CARE-Index was designed to represent. The more sensitive the behavior of the fathers within the appropriate zone of proximal development, the more opportunities existed for children to respond cooperatively. The fathers who were in tune with their children during the appropriate zone of proximal development task created interactions in which the child was comfortable within the zone of proximal development ($p = 0.596$).

In unresponsive fathers, the lack of reciprocal interaction and connection with their children was related to passivity. The more unresponsive the father was, the more passive the child became ($p = 0.892$). When no reciprocity was present, connection within the dyad was difficult because of the father's lack of sensitivity to the child's signals. Often, this would cause

the child to disconnect and become more aloof. In these interactions, play was often very disconnected and activities were beyond or below the zone of proximal development for the child. In other words, the child would disconnect from tasks that were either too simple or too difficult, but the father would not notice that disconnect.

Controlling behaviors in the fathers was related to compulsivity of their children with a correlation of ($p = 0.608$). The fathers, who were outside of the appropriate zone of proximal development, were far from comfortable in interacting with their children and, in contrast to the unresponsive–passive pattern mentioned earlier, there were usually strong contingency behaviors to the controlling–compulsive pattern. These contingencies were usually conditional on a response or wanted behavior for the father. For instance, a father who exhibited this behavior pattern might control the situation to present the appearance of a sensitive–cooperative dyad, but in reality, his actions would be designed to make the situation to appear in a better light; in these cases, the children knew how to respond with compliance to diminish the anxiety involved in the situation.

Discussion

In agreement with prior studies of mothers (Crittenden, 1992; Crittenden & Landini, 2014; DiLalla & Crittenden, 1990), this study indicated that father sensitivity correlated with infant cooperation: the more sensitive the father, the more cooperative or engaged the infant. This dynamic, in turn, could lead to an increase in the dyadic synchrony score and the appearance of higher quality interactions and relationships. Moreover, the results indicated that paternal lack of responsiveness was not affected by demographics in the sample population; rather, paternal unresponsiveness correlated with infant difficultness in all subsamples regardless of demographics. The fathers who were unresponsive had difficulty connecting with their infants

and responding to their signals for engagement or cues to stop certain behaviors. The fathers might have been slow to warm and with more video times might have demonstrated an increased synchrony score.

According to the DMM approach, one adverse outcome of decreased synchrony in parent–infant interactions is the addition of personal risk factors such as individual mental health struggles (Crittenden, 2015; Rutter, 2006). Demographics, such as employment status, paternal age, and marital status, potentially can have adverse effects on the parent–child interaction as well (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Although the present study found that the fathers without risk conditions (i.e., fathers in middle-income families and those who were employed) displayed attentive, affectionate, and responsive behavior, the impact of demographics were not reflected in this sample.

Infants tend to react to paternal lack of responsiveness with passivity (Crittenden, 1992). Therefore, as the researcher's training has indicated, moderate levels of paternal unresponsive behavior can increase infant difficultness, whereas high levels of paternal unresponsive behavior promote infant passivity (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The degree of paternal unresponsivity can potentially affect the infant's response (Crittenden, 1992). If the social interaction is only a modest problem (e.g., the father is inactive or the play is not developmentally appropriate), the infant can struggle to increase or decrease the father's response. In the face of little or no interaction, infants do not have a chance to learn how to take part in social interactions with their fathers (Crittenden & Landini, 2015). Therefore, the results of this study revealed there are specific patterns of father–infant interaction that vary according to both dyadic relational and zone of proximal development.

Regarding the issue of assessing the quality of father–infant interactions, it is important to note that fathers who were sensitive to their infants' cues were able to connect with their children and operate at the appropriate developmental level in the play task. Fathers who operated outside the zone of proximal development for the play task created environments in which the infants responded by either disengaging or performing the task with little connection to the dyad. An encouraging outcome of this study was its consistency with the patterns found in extensive research using the CARE-Index with mothers. The relationships between patterns shown in Table 4-4 were consistent with the relationships found between patterns in previous studies (Hautamäki et al., 2010).

Parents tend to rely on what they know and have seen, and as seen in this study, fathers often imitate the mothers' actions. In many cases, the mothers held the children before the videotaping began and then transitioned out of the picture as the fathers placed themselves in the position the mothers had held previously. The researcher noted this occurrence in half the sample population. Such behaviors can potentially have positive outcomes for the mother–child dyad, but it often comes across as a controlling pattern for fathers because they are focused on the activity as the mothers had completed it rather than aligning with their children's responses in the current scenario. The children may have also been transitioning from mother to father and that affected the overall synchrony score as well. When this occurred, the quality of the relationship measured by the CARE-Index would reflect a lower dyadic synchrony score.

Methodological Issues

This study laid the groundwork for research involving larger, more diverse samples to advance the use of the CARE-Index with fathers. Specific advantages of the CARE-Index measure are that it includes both over-responsiveness (control) and under-responsiveness in the

assessment of parental sensitivity and considers the infants' interactive patterns, not just the fathers' (Parfitt, Pike, & Ayers, 2013). The sample size, however, was limited statistically, resulting in a lack of power and an increased likelihood of type II errors. The sample also mainly consisted of Caucasian Americans who were well educated in two-parent families with middle incomes, which limited the generalizability of the results. Future studies should explore whether fathers' interactional patterns change over time within the zones of proximal development as the child ages. Finally, determining the optimal infant age at which to measure paternal interactions was a relevant methodological issue. Although this study found some similarities between the father–infant interactions examined here and the mother–infant interactions assessed in other studies, it is possible that more similarities may appear as part of a normal transition into fatherhood. Future studies are needed to clarify the links among the numerous parental interactions that can occur between the fathers and their infants over time using multiple DMM assessments.

Because the CARE-Index was originally based on mother–child interactions, it is possible that some interactional behavior items may not apply to fathers and their interactions with their children. For instance, when mothers are the primary caregiver, they have increased interactions with their infants; thus, these interactions can have predictive value for infantile reactions (Crittenden, 2007).

Conclusions

The finding that a proportion of the father–infant dyads presented with at-risk interactions may imply that the scale was not necessarily representative of all behaviors that can be considered sensitive in fathers. It is also possible that the play tasks within the zone of proximal development may be different for fathers. Therefore, the CARE-Index may not be a valid

measure for fathers. Furthermore, the seven interactional behavior items may not be comprehensive; the indicators or signifier behaviors that represent examples of sensitive body position or contact may appear different for fathers than for mothers. The interactional behavioral items assessed in this study were identified based on the mothers' interactions, so further video analysis may be needed to eliminate certain indicators or add others that promote reciprocal interaction in these father–child dyads.

Because of the availability of portable video, observations of father–infant interaction could become a part of routine screening for early detection of father–infant relationship problems in families. These problems may indicate risks or simply may be symptoms of the father's sense of uncertainty about his performance as a new father. Once a dyad has a dyadic synchrony score, the parents could be offered intervention or education, thus allowing them the opportunity to improve the quality of their relationship with their children. The level of intervention can be structured based on the score to best guide the father. For example, if the synchrony score falls in the 0–4 range, individual clinical work may be necessary to help the father address his own personal issues, freeing his mind to focus on interaction with his child. The CARE-Index can capture a moment in time for these fathers, potentially opening the door to other DMM assessments that may be beneficial to improve overall family functioning. Further exploration with larger samples and comparisons between mother–child and father–child interactions could increase the potential to develop the DMM assessments further as tools to use with fathers.

Furthermore, preventive programming designed to help fathers learn to interact well with their infants should be provided to enhance the quality of father–child interactions over time. The unique role of fathers in the family and the importance of including both parents in DMM

assessments present opportunities to educate parents in regard to the importance of the zones of proximal development. This approach would not only provide parents with an early understanding of what their child is capable of doing but also explore what the parents are comfortable doing in interactions with their children. Research collaboration with primary care doctors and pediatricians can provide opportunities for multiple assessments of relationship quality using the CARE-Index paired with routine medical visits. Videos can be completed in the office setting on mobile devices and stored over time. Often, these routine well-child medical visits coincide with the zones of proximal development and play-based tasks.

Research produces an ever-changing understanding of the human experience. From this research study comes the possibility to better fit professionals' understanding of early father–child interactions to the needs of fathers through new knowledge about the impact of assessing relational quality via the CARE-Index. This study contributes to the literature on the CARE-Index as an assessment tool by applying it to measure the quality of father–child reciprocal interactions. The qualitative information presented in Chapters 2 and 3 pave the way for further exploration of the meanings fathers place on their interactions with their children. For example, a father who shares a special game with his child can describe the interaction verbally in detail. By using the CARE-Index, we can now record this interaction, code it, and report on the quality of the relationship based on a dyadic synchrony score and father–infant patterning. This information can reshape how we view fathers within their family units.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CARE-Index Infant Score Form

CARE-Index Infant Score Form

ID_____ Characteristics _____Coder _____

Synchrony score: _____ Exemplar: _____Signifier behaviors:

Facial Exp.	Vocal Exp.	Position	Affection	Turn-taking	Control	Activity
Caregiver						
1 2ab 3ab	4 5ab 6ab	7 8ab 9ab	10 11ab 12ab	13 14ab 15ab	16 17ab 18ab	19 20ab 21ab

Sensitive____ Controlling (a___ b ___) Total C ____ Unresponsive (a___ b ___) Total U ____

Infant						
1 2c 2d 3	4 5c 5d 6	7 8c 8d 9	10 1lc 11d 12	13 14c 14d 15	16 17c 17d 18	19 20c 20d 21

Cooperative ___Compulsive (cp__cc__ ca__ cg__) Total [c] ____ Difficult [d] ____Passive ____

****

ID_____ Characteristics _____Coder _____

Synchrony score: _____ Exemplar: _____Signifier behaviors:

Facial Exp.	Vocal Exp.	Position	Affection	Turn-taking	Control	Activity
Caregiver						
1 2ab 3ab	4 5ab 6ab	7 8ab 9ab	10 11ab 12ab	13 14ab 15ab	16 17ab 18ab	19 20ab 21ab

Sensitive____ Controlling (a___ b ___) Total C ____ Unresponsive (a___ b ___) Total U ____

Infant						
1 2c 2d 3	4 5c 5d 6	7 8c 8d 9	10 1lc 11d 12	13 14c 14d 15	16 17c 17d 18	19 20c 20d 21

Cooperative ___Compulsive (cp__cc__ ca__ cg__) Total [c] ____ Difficult [d] ____Passive ____

****

ID_____Characteristics _____Coder _____

Synchrony score: _____ Exemplar: _____Signifier behaviors:

Facial Exp.	Vocal Exp.	Position	Affection	Turn-taking	Control	Activity
Caregiver						
1 2ab 3ab	4 5ab 6ab	7 8ab 9ab	10 11ab 12ab	13 14ab 15ab	16 17ab 18ab	19 20ab 21ab

Sensitive____ Controlling (a___ b ___) Total C ____ Unresponsive (a___ b ___) Total U ____

Infant						
1 2c 2d 3	4 5c 5d 6	7 8c 8d 9	10 1lc 11d 12	13 14c 14d 15	16 17c 17d 18	19 20c 20d 21

Cooperative ___Compulsive (cp__cc__ ca__ cg__) Total [c] ____ Difficult [d] ____Passive ____

APPENDIX B

Basic Demographic Information Form

1. Age of child? _____ Gender? Male Female Birth order? _____

2. Birth complications? _____

3. Disabilities? _____

4. Daycare? Yes No Beginning at (age): _____ Full / half day?

5. Age of father _____

6. Marital status? Single Cohabiting Married Separated Divorced

7. Number of children? _____

8. Income? Upper Middle Low Poverty

9. Father works? Yes Part-time No

10. Ethnicity: _____

11. Is the father an immigrant? ____ Child of immigrants?_____ From (country) _____

12. Previous mental health treatment (for mother, family, child, sibs, etc.)? Never Past Currently

13. Has the child been maltreated? Physical abuse Neglect Sexual abuse Marginal maltreatment

If yes for 12 or 13, please PRINT CLEARLY a description (on the back) of the issues, treatment, and outcome.

APPENDIX C

CARE-Index Dyadic Synchrony/Treatment Scale

ADEQUATE RANGE

Sensitive (14-11) (No intervention)
14-13 Mutual delight, joy in one another; a dance.

12-11 Smooth, pleasing interaction; playful, shared positive affect.

Adequate (10-7)
10-9 Quite satisfactory play; no problems, but no dance. (No intervention)

8-7 Adequate play, but noticeable periods of dysynchrony (either controlling or unresponsive), with repair. (Optional parent education)

INTERVENTION RANGE (Interpersonal mother-baby intervention)

Inept (5-6)
6-5 Clear, unresolved problems; limited playfulness, but no evidence of hostility or lack of empathy (unresponsiveness).

HIGH - RISK RANGE (maternal psychotherapy)

At risk (0-4)
4-3 Clear lack of empathy, nevertheless, some feeble (insufficient or unsuccessful) attempt is made to respond to infant; lack of playful quality.

2-0 Total failure to perceive or attempt to sooth infant's distressed state; no play.

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CHAPTER 5

Integration of the Quality of Father-child Interaction across Chapters

A review of the literature for this dissertation showed that father-related research has centered on three dimensions: (a) engagement, (b) accessibility, and (c) responsibility (Bretherton, 2010; Featherstone, 1996, 2009; Lewis & Lamb, 2007). These dimensions are described as the amount of time fathers spend interacting with, being accessible to, or making arrangements for the care of their children. All three dimensions have been present throughout the chapters of this dissertation. Engagement occurred and was represented in both qualitative interviews and the CARE-Index study. These fathers not only described how they engaged, but we were also able to use the seven interactional items of the CARE-Index to document this engagement and gauge the reciprocity of the interaction. Fathers described instances of spending time with their children and allowing the reciprocal interactions to happen. Being present and accessible to the children allowed fathers to respond to the subtle signs that children might give off and use those signs to increase dyadic synchrony. Responsibility appeared to encompass all the chapters of this dissertation in the process of becoming a father while being able to respond and allowing the infant to participate in the relationship. Fathers described this as developing not only a personal balance in their lives, but also understanding their preparation and who they are in the dynamic relationship between father and child. They often spoke of the financial and personal responsibility of having a child. Pleck and Masciardrelli (2004) reviewed nationally representative data sets using time, budget, and diary data and found that there had been an increase in the amount of time that fathers devoted to childcare activities. In the United States, evidence shows that higher-educated and more financially advantaged fathers tend to devote more time to childcare (Dermott, 2008). This area deserves further exploration across socioeconomic statuses to not only qualitatively represent these activities, but also to explore the

quality of these relationships. The time spent with children may be increasing, and the quality of the relationship between father and child may be the same or better across different financial or educational levels.

The researcher looked beyond childcare to determine the meaning attributed by fathers to their relationships with their children and to explore the quality of these relationships. Particular focus was placed on interactions between father and child to begin discussing the behaviors used in interactions. Exploring beyond childcare and using interviews as well as play allowed fathers to be themselves and interact with their children as they normally would. Fathers were able to describe their previous interactions and demonstrate what they enjoyed doing with their children. The combination of these data began to suggest more wholly a relationship rather than just a set of caregiving activities. Childcare was often discussed, but this was in addition to, among many other areas, their partner relationship, family relationships, and personal fears and excitement.

The DMM theory of attachment has been extended through new analyses of relationships across the entire lifespan, but in this dissertation, the focus was on the very early years of life. The quality of the infant-parent relationship over the first years of life was identified by Main and Weston (1981) as the most important aspect in healthy development over a lifespan, which was later emphasized by Crittenden and Landini (2011). Infancy is only a snapshot of the lifespan, and other assessments are needed throughout the lifespan and across the family unit to better understand the level of family functioning. Furthermore, the development of the Adult Attachment Interview (Main & Weston, 1981) and the DMM (Crittenden, 1995; Crittenden & Landini, 2011) shifted the focus of attachment work to include the entire lifespan from infancy to adulthood, encompassing a broader approach to the impact of development over the lifespan.

Pleck and Masciardrelli (2004) identified a beneficial impact of positive father involvement on children's lives. However, exactly what counts as positive depends, to an extent, on the theoretical models of the psychologists, sociologists, or social workers, as well as the age of the child (Pleck & Masciardrelli, 2004). For this researcher and the data, the positive impact is the influence on and investment in the developing relationship. As fathers adapted to their new children, the children also appeared to adapt. The fathers' ability to engage and alter their behavioral interactional items to promote synchrony increased not only the length, but also the enjoyment of the interaction for both father and child. When the engagement did not work, fathers appeared to reflect upon and change their behavior to improve the situation. Indeed, the positive interactional behaviors include those likely to promote increased reciprocal interaction and well-being in a broad sense, such as warm, responsive, and sensitive interaction; monitoring and guiding behavior to set limits; and caring for the child's physical welfare (Pleck & Masciardrelli, 2004). Furthermore, with respect to the benefits of positive father interaction and involvement, O'Brien (2005) emphasized the importance of the context in which the relationship exists:

> Father involvement cannot be separated from the network of family relationships within which it is embedded. The couple relationship is a key one, setting the scene against which parents negotiate and balance their family and employment roles and responsibilities. Research has suggested that high paternal involvement is grounded in a harmonious couple relationship. (p. 9)

This dissertation explored the interactional nature and quality of father-child relationships. It focused on dyadic interactions and fathers' constructed meanings, excluding all other subsystems and every triangle in the family. The researcher's intention is to build on this

research through further use of DMM assessments to construct a DMM Family Functional Formulation (FFF) for fathers and their families, in which parents negotiate their roles and responsibilities through interactions with other members of the family. The DMM FFF is a developing model of exploring family functioning using DMM theory. More research is needed to expand the use of the DMM FFF in working with families, especially including fathers in the formulations (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Crittenden and Landini (2011) explained that the DMM FFF is based on multiple sources of information, is about the entire family, focuses on strengths, and highlights reciprocal and systemic effects. Specifically, the DMM FFF addresses how things are now, how they came to be, what maintains them as they are, and what might change them and in what ways. The assessment of the family is then used to identify the critical area in which change is needed. If changed, the causal factor may initiate other changes, ultimately focusing more clearly on the threats to overall family functioning. Using the CARE-Index with fathers is part of this overall assessment. Using the CARE-Index for father-infant, mother-infant, parent interviews, and individual adult attachment interviews for both parents provides a clear picture of how a family may be functioning at a given time. Because of the lack of research involving fathers and these DMM assessments, the researcher aims to contribute to existing knowledge by expanding the literature about father-child relational quality and the interactions that enhance or inhibit the development of reciprocal interaction.

Indeed, it is important for social workers to notice the dangers of abstracting father involvement or activities from the overall relationship context in which they operate (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). This information cannot exist in isolation and must be combined with other information or assessments. As described, one way to contribute to the literature and put a father's relationship in context is to expand the DMM assessment base to include more examples

and studies with fathers. The data reviewed throughout this dissertation support this notion and have indicated the importance of locating father involvement contextually. Goldman (2005) and Featherstone (2009) state that fathers are more likely to be involved if the child's mother is involved, if they get involved early on, and if the school is welcoming to parents. Again, the context in which the relationship exists is important because many external factors can influence how and when fathers interact with their children.

One goal of this dissertation was to extend Bowlby's (1958), Ainsworth's (1973), and Crittenden's (2011) range of theories and measurements that are applied to mothers and fathers as caregivers. These researchers focused their attention on mothers, while this dissertation used their frameworks to focus on fathers. The review of the literature, the CARE-Index study, and the two qualitative research studies began with an exploration of how fathers describe their relationships with their young children and transitioned to a measurement of the quality of father-infant interaction based on interactional behavior items that led to a dyadic synchrony score. Acknowledging the limitations of this research and what it highlights in terms of the focus on reciprocal interaction is potentially a key to move father research forward. Furthermore, there are methodological issues about how to best capture the way in which individuals spend their time and what meanings are attached to activities, as well as considerable debate about what should be measured and what counts as positive interaction between a father and child (Dermott, 2006; Lewis & Lamb, 2007).

In connection with the growing interest in father studies, attachment theory has created many new empirical projects and methodological contributions. Understanding the methodological contribution of attachment in terms of strengths and weaknesses allows for potential integration of father research and attachment research to move forward beyond this

dissertation. For many, the most important methodological contribution to the study of attachment remains Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Other researchers have followed Ainsworth's lead in studying attachment in various conditions with the SSP and newer methodologies (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Maslin-Cole & Speiker, 1990), culturally diverse samples (Cicchetti & Barnett, 1991; Crittenden, 1995), and increasingly older samples, moving beyond infancy and preschool into adulthood (Bretherton, Prentiss, & Ridgeway, 1990; Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Most early researchers of attachment relied on observed behavioral interaction of the caregiver-child dyad to determine how differences in the security of attachment at one point in time relates to past dyadic interactions or to future behavior (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Main et al., 1985).

Nevertheless, criticisms of attachment theory are extensive and beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, what is important are the issues related to fathers. Daniel and Taylor (2001) contend that attachment theory has been refined and developed to incorporate the potential not only for attachment with the father, but also for multiple attachment figures across the family unit. One message emerging from current attachment work is that it does not matter who the attachment figure is as long as there is at least one (Daniel & Taylor, 2001). A key insight from recent attachment work that is vitally important for fathers is that the capacity to interact reciprocally with one's child is increasingly understood as a developmental capacity rather than just innate or biological (Bretherton, 2010).

Fathers and their children have been observed, and policies have been developed that affect the father-child relationship, but personal stories and narratives have rarely been gathered. Therefore, the focus of this dissertation was on the quality of father-child interaction, the behaviors that fathers use to interact with their young children from the perspective of the DMM,

and how this interaction is described using phenomenology. The CARE-Index study explored the seven interactional behavioral items between the father and infant. These interactional items were coded into patterns that can be used in combination with other DMM assessments to identify the level of family functioning.

Father-Child Relationship Quality across Dissertation Chapters

The two qualitative studies showed how fathers describe their personal connection with their children. The goal of phenomenology is to get as close as possible to someone's experience. Therefore, the researcher remained relatively silent, allowing the participants' experience to unfold spontaneously (Osborne, 1994). Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2009) stress the importance of letting the participant take priority over one's own preconceptions and opening the interview with an unbiased, receptive presence. The interviews revealed not only positive and healthy relationship indicators, but also comfortable settings to foster further growth of the father-child dyadic relationship. The phenomenological studies provided an opportunity to hear the fathers' voices and allow them to develop a narrative that described their relationship with their children. The purposive sampling of positively engaged fathers also offered an opportunity to investigate aspects of emotionally healthy father-child interactional behaviors to best transfer them to social work treatment settings.

Father-child relationships were again the focus of the second qualitative study, but close attention was paid to shared affection. These narratives were full of emotion that reflected positive, healthy indicators of attachment between fathers and their children. The rich data seemed to emphasize, once again, DMM research focused on the strategies used to build connections with the parent and promote safety across the lifespan. These data can be integral to creating the FFF for designing programs and maintaining opportunities for the fathers' voices to

be heard. This has the potential to treat relational disruptions between father and child as well as the entire family unit.

Combined, the studies revealed what interactions the fathers were comfortable with and enjoyed sharing with their children. They often spoke of their responsibility to protect and how the children were now the most important people in their lives. Growth within their relationship was described as fathers discussed their own internal working models in coming to a personal understanding of what being a father meant to them. They wanted to engage and acted on their own personal knowledge of what it meant to be a father. Their action led to a reaction from their children that either reinforced their interactional behavior or changed it. As this interaction continued over time, fathers described how their children began to expect certain behaviors and engaged with the fathers on their own, which in turn evoked an emotional reaction in the fathers. This reciprocal interaction transitioned into the CARE-Index study by setting the stage for an assessment of these interactions.

The third paper involved using the CARE-Index as a play-based assessment of relationship quality based on seven interactional behavior items. The paper explored the research question: Which interactive patterns, as assessed by the Infant CARE-Index, are present in father–infant play within this sample? Parent-infant play activities promote optimal child developmental outcomes (Grossmann et al., 2002, p. 314). The extent to which parent-infant play predicts infant attachment seems to depend on the quality of the parent-infant interaction (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The fathers in this study who engaged with their infants within the appropriate zone of proximal development overall displayed a sensitive-cooperative pattern of interaction with their children. This may have happened for one or several reasons: they were aware of the zones of proximal development by knowing what their children could and could not

do to interact; they took pleasure in playing with their infants and therefore engaged in parent-infant play more often; or they had more time to engage in play (Fuertes et al., 2015). Similarities in the patterns of the CARE-Index reflected patterns of mothers studied in previous work (Crittenden, 2007; Crittenden & Landini, 2014). Based on the phenomenological analysis and the results of the CARE-Index study, one could incorporate the voice of the fathers with a video feedback tool to focus on the quality of parent-infant play in early childhood. Fuertes et al. (2015) reported that greater involvement of fathers with infants could provide critical social support for mothers, which in turn could buffer the impact of daily stressors and thereby indirectly support mothers' abilities to provide care to infants (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; Minuchin, 1985).

Connecting the Chapters to the Literature

The model of fatherhood that fathers appear to favor is based on establishing a strong emotional relationship between father and child (Doucet, 2006). The first phenomenological study explored fathers' lived experiences in their role of fathers to young children. Fathers in this study questioned their new role as a father within the broader context of how they engage with their children. Fathers worked through their understanding of what it meant to be a father and how that process created some discourse in their thought patterns as they balanced who they were and who they are now. The fathers who were interviewed stated that being involved fathers was an important responsibility; being able to obtain balance, patience, and time with their partner generated a sense of accomplishment. The fathers interviewed talked about their lack of sleep and disruption to their daily routines as not everything about fatherhood was pleasant and expected. However, due to the nature of the questions the focus remained on the positive

experiences of being a father. Further development of the questions may allow more discussion of the potential unexpected aspects of fathering.

The phenomenological interviews (Chapters 2 and 3) elicited narratives from fathers concerning their relationships with their infants and children. This was intended to return father research to the basic principles of attachment theory, particularly the DMM's interactional focus, through the lens of postmodern, qualitative methodologies and, specifically, interpretive phenomenology (Creswell, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). These methodologies emphasize the personal meaning that fathers attribute to their experiences of fatherhood. The stories in Chapters 2 and 3 illustrate the breadth and depth of bridging father research with attachment theory. The data reflect the opportunity to expand attachment theory. Fathers spoke movingly of their relationships with their children; they expanded the basics of attachment theory as they shared narratives of interactions with their children. These men were so absorbed in the process of storytelling that their body language enhanced the narrative. They told their stories with words and tears and shared their stories with little to no hesitation.

The CARE-Index chapter built upon existing DMM research by mirroring the patterns that were often present in mother-child dyads. These pattern combinations were present in father-child dyads and reflected the DMM literature, contributing to a new direction in using the CARE-Index. Fathers who were aware of how their children could interact chose activities that focused on the child's appropriate zone of proximal development. Interestingly, this often reflected many of the interactional behavior items that fathers became aware of, as well as which were working versus those that were not working. Fathers made adjustments within the appropriate zone of proximal development. Crittenden and Landini (2014) refer to this as a developing internal working model that places the father in the moment of interaction and allows

him to engage with his child and for his child to reciprocally interact to enhance the overall quality of the relationship.

Implications for Practice, Education, and Further Research

This section explores the implications for social work practice, social work education, and possibilities for future research beyond this dissertation by focusing on expansion of the data to include other DMM assessments, the neurology of attcahment and increasing the sample of fathers from underrepresented populations in the research. The CARE-Index needs further validation of its clinical usefulness, including its applicability to fathers from a wide range of cultures. More longitudinal studies of father-child attachment would be useful so the results could be compared with results from laboratory procedures, such as the PAA and SSP (Farnfield et al., 2010). To encourage further use of research with fathers, it would be beneficial to compare both the CARE-Index assessments and longitudinal studies with laboratory results of other DMM assessments. Using the findings in combination with the qualitative interviews, one could expand the thematic analysis longitudinally to see how the relational interaction might change with time. This would also allow researchers to explore the dynamic aspects of the relationship over time.

Wilkinson (2010) states that using assessment tools in the DMM has the potential to evolve into the most evidence-based model for a wide range of clinical interventions for psychological distress across the lifespan. In terms of its potential for working with fathers, adding the DMM as a theoretical lens could help to underscore the importance for fathers to avoid using certain interactional behaviors with their infants and the impact these behaviors may have on their ability to engage with their children over the lifespan. Indeed, this could lead to these fathers reflecting more on the interactional nature of their relationships and working on

understanding their own feelings and those of others (including their children) in close relationships. For fathers who are unable to engage with their children, social workers could create the safest possible setting by working with fathers to amplify their effect and work through their anxiety in their interactions with their infants. This could include working on doing what is comfortable for the father, as well as meeting the needs of others in close family relationships.

This author finds increasing appreciation for the potential strength of a model such as the DMM and using the multitude of assessments that are available. Of potential greater importance is the need to remain cautious regarding the potential of the DMM because it is inevitably reductive, and the CARE-Index patterns could be viewed as reified categories (Pocock, 2010). Careful attention should be given to not encouraging individuals to become controlling or unresponsive. A safeguard is to adopt a mindful approach to the philosophies of knowledge and reality (Orange, 1995), which contextualize the use of any social work theory. Social workers operate with what they have and what they get, applying knowledge to reality and using reality to create knowledge (Orange, 1995).

There is also an ongoing debate about whether men who are more involved with children correlates with greater harmony between involved partners (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). However, men who choose to be involved fathers are not necessarily interested in sharing equal responsibilities with their partners (Dermott, 2008). Feminist researchers into father work have examined what is occurring with fathers, fatherhood, and fathering today (Featherstone, 2009). Men have been described as “cherry picking” the more enjoyable aspects of childcare, such as playing or nurturing children emotionally, while women are having to play vital roles in day-to-

day care (Gatrell, 2007). Nevertheless, there continues to be growing interest in how men and women divide domestic tasks, including childcare.

> Childcare and domestic labor is now passing to other parties. Such a passing on of care and domestic labor does not mean that structures of power and inequality have faded away. Rather, they are being displaced within an increasingly global and mobile economy. (cited in Featherstone, 2009; Collier & Sheldon, 2008, p. 136)

However, fatherhood research into the dynamics of childcare and the interpersonal interactions that occur between father and child during this time is raising awareness of the complexities across ethnicities and classes (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). Understanding who identifies as the primary caregiver within the family is another area of complexity that may influence the interpersonal interactions that occur between father and child.

Moreover, there is a growing interest in developing a research agenda centered on fathers of children with disabilities, who would be deemed vulnerable in terms of both their impact on each other (Burgess, 2007; Kilkey, 2007). Crittenden (2008) acknowledges the limits of knowledge, and the DMM itself continues to undergo development through other layers of theory. Layering the DMM with other theories tied to fatherhood may allow for further understanding of the contextual influences of fathers' social surroundings and the impact of participating in services affecting their relationship with their children.

The second phenomenological study's focus on affection is a good example of how fathers view their strong emotional connection to their children. The idea was presented of the infant becoming the enactor in the attachment relationship, which is an interesting area that deserves further exploration using DMM theory as a framework. The change in enactment appeared to represent a change in behavior and emotional awareness in the fathers. Social

workers potentially could use this information to help their clients explore how they can become in tune with their infants by becoming more behaviorally and emotionally aware. Often, many other emotional issues need to be taken care of that are not tied to a parent's interaction with his or her children but that are impeding that growth (Crittenden & Landini, 2014). The ability to describe the interactions that fathers are already having in their interpersonal relationships, outside of the immediate father-child interaction, can provide a man with useful tools to be successful socially, which in turn could potentially translate into an improved relationship with his child (Crittenden & Landini, 2014).

Changes in social work practice in working with fathers should not be made haphazardly without careful review of the body of knowledge relating to fathers (Clapton, 2009). The importance of fatherhood in social work practice can have many implications, from the personal development of the male client to the continued impact that a father has on his child. Additionally, the tendency to transfer poor parenting practices across generations raises important questions regarding how to help young expectant fathers develop skills their own fathers may have lacked (Ngu & Florsheim, 2011). Furthermore, as social workers continue educating young fathers, it is important to re-examine the fathers' own experiences. This could be accomplished by using the DMM, thus potentially leading to a better understanding of what internal processing the father is bringing to the parental role. Several factors appear to account for decreased relationship satisfaction after a child is born. These can include inequitable distribution of childcare, fatigue, shifting social orientation to the new child, and reductions in sexual desire (Van Anders & Gray, 2007, p. 57). These fathers may lack engagement and then eventually become absent.

Integrating the DMM into clinical practice could help social workers identify children and fathers who may benefit from different levels of intervention (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Whether it involves parent education or individual, dyadic, or family therapy, understanding the uniqueness of each family member and each family's behaviors, roles, and processes should facilitate the best practices for moving forward in working with fathers. Of additional importance is the need to be aware of fathers' cultural dynamics and competence when designing interventions and treatment. The DMM theory of attachment focuses on interpersonal interaction and the use of behaviors within that interaction. In taking a critical eye to social work practice, it is important to remember that the children being worked with today are potentially the parents of tomorrow.

Play is a behavioral way to assess interactional relationships between father and child (Crittenden & Landini, 2014). Play was used in this dissertation because it represents the freedom and spontaneous exploration, which is the language of children. Traditional talk therapy often utilizes important aspects of interpersonal interaction, but sometimes it takes the focus off the actual play. Play was discussed as a significant opportunity for fathers to share with their children in Chapters 2 and 3. The Infant CARE-Index, described in Chapter 4, could be used with fathers because it is a play-based system designed to assess dyadic synchrony through seven interactional behavioral items that evaluate the fit between the attachment figure and the child. Additionally, because the CARE-Index is designed to assess interaction and not attachment, it can be used with adults the child does not know to assess the adult's sensitivity to infant and/or toddler cues regarding pleasure or distress (Crittenden, 1981, 2008). The outcomes are treated as the product of the adult-child relationship rather than the characteristics of either individual—that is, the behaviors of each person are scored from the perspective of the other (Crittenden,

2008). Combining this assessment with other DMM assessments in the FFF can paint a picture of how the family is functioning and the main behaviors that individuals are using in their interpersonal interactions. Understanding this interactional dynamic across the family unit from multiple sources provides more information to make treatment or intervention decisions.

As a tool for treatment, the CARE-Index provides less information on child attachment than the stress-based Strange Situation Procedure (Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, because the adult is a more active participant, the CARE-Index can give greater information on the parent's contribution to the child's pattern. A further advantage is that the CARE-Index can be conducted by one person anywhere and repeated several times without compromising its validity (Crittenden, 2007). With this flexibility, social work educators can collect these videotapes quickly at convenient locations (e.g., at doctor appointments or in the home) rather than at case management or therapy appointments. Social work students can become involved in this research during their educational training to further enhance their knowledge development around parental interaction. The potential to work interdisciplinary with medical providers, such as family doctors, creates unique opportunities to bring together routine early childhood medical appointments with CARE-Index videos. These videos could be done during these routine visits to the office over time while father and child are waiting for the doctor to arrive. Longitudinally this would build developing information for the family over time.

These recordings can also be done by the parents themselves. These parents can take an active involvement in the assessment, which may translate into more involvement in the education or treatment intervention. A significant strength of assessing interaction rather than attachment is that the results are more easily converted for use in practice settings than other attachment assessments from the DMM (Farnfield, et al., 2010). For example, the interaction

assessment can play a key part in working with fathers by viewing the videotape with the father and social worker or the expanded family unit and social worker. The video tapes can be used to highlight positive interactional behaviors and call attention to behaviors that may be inhibiting the growth of the relationship.

The interactional items of the CARE-Index cover seven areas: (a) facial expression, (b) vocal expression, (c) position and body contact, (d) expression of affection, (e) pacing of turns, (f) control, and (g) choice of activity. These seven interactional items are categories for social work educators to consider in clinical education and training and for clinicians to consider in treatment settings. These indicators and the subsequent patterns have implications in clinical practice, not only with children, but also with adults who did not have healthy, positive relationships early in their lives. Since early relationships often set the stage for all future relationships (Crittenden & Landini, 2011), the potential implications of advancing attachment research about individual family members that expands throughout the lifespan may provide further information on how to work with fathers who may be struggling with their own issues in connecting with their children. Using this information as a framework for transitions that individuals and families may encounter across a lifespan contributes to how fathers exist within their social environments (Fitton, 2008).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodological Designs

The papers discussed in this dissertation were exploratory in nature. The CARE-Index study was used to highlight the interactional items of fathers, which in turn were translated into their relational pattern, which led to a dyadic synchrony score, which was used to discuss the quality of the relationship. The CARE-Index study also shows how one instrument should be combined with others to develop the clearest possible picture of family functioning. The strength

of the phenomenological interviews was that they gave a voice to the fathers who have lived the experiences. This approach was an acknowledgment of the embodied, emotional, temporal, and socio-cultural experiences of the fathers and was thereby holistic in the investigation, in keeping with social work values. One of the strengths of these three studies is the new view of the father-child relationship from a positive, healthy perspective, taking into account the interactional nature of the father-child relationship. While this is illustrative of relationship difficulties and the hard work that goes into changing interactional behaviors over time, the study sheds light on the potential usefulness of combining methods with the CARE-Index in research and social work practice. Researchers, educators, clinicians, and fathers who are able to recognize maladaptive interactional behaviors can work with individuals and dyads to improve their interactions with their children. Understanding fathers' lived experiences may provide new ways to understand why fathers may use maladaptive interactional behaviors when interacting with their children.

However, one weakness is the limited research using the CARE-Index with fathers and its lack of validation. There are only a few father-child dyads in the CARE-Index training materials and fewer in the reliability exams the trainers and coders are required to take. The study represents a return to and reinforcement of the relationship between the patterns based on mother-child interaction, but in the present environment of assessing fathers, it also lacks the experimental rigor needed to take a strong stance on the applicability of the instrument to fathers. Nevertheless, the study data did indicate that when fathers were playing with their children within the appropriate zone of proximal development, the interactional items led to more sensitive and cooperative patterns for the dyad. From a social work perspective, it may make sense to seriously consider these interactional items and patterns in working with fathers to improve their relationships with their children; again, it should be emphasized that the CARE-

Index is one of multiple assessments needed to understand the functioning of the entire family unit.

Other strengths are the fathers' stories and vivid descriptions describing the impact that having a child has had on their lives and the changes that have taken place as a result. Weaknesses in both study designs include cultural homogeneity and small sample sizes. There are also other groups of men that have other orientations to fathering that are not represented in this study. The fathers that participated for this study self-selected to participate and were open and willing to share their stories. The CARE-Index study might have been enhanced by adding still shots to the design for a pictorial view of the interactional items that could further validate the patterns that emerged from the study. Finally, videotaping the phenomenological interviews with fathers would have added nonverbal aspects that could have potentially been tied to the interactional items used in the CARE-Index study. The affective element of each interview was missed through the use of audiotape.

Conclusion

Based on the information presented in this dissertation, it is recommended that fathers be included in future research involving attachment and the impact a father may have on his developing child. Social workers can look closer at father-child interactions and how fathers can use different intervention techniques to promote not only improved interaction with their children, but also overall family functioning. For example, social workers could work as policy advocates and use different types of media to advocate for fathers through the fathers' stories and engagement by health-care professionals in early childhood. Advocacy for laws could also protect fathers from being penalized for taking time away from work and even encourage fathers to take leave to accompany their partners to pre-birth classes and appointments as well as

childbirth. The findings of this dissertation indicate that there is much more work to be done, and the fathers studied are interested in sharing their stories and experiences.

Substantial advances have been made in the field of fatherhood and attachment, although more can be done to gain knowledge of the experience of being a father and how attachment work with fathers can become an integral part of social work practice. Listening to fathers' voices and incorporating fathers into FFF based on DMM theory builds on the inclusion of the impact of fathers on family functioning through their interpersonal interactions with each family member. Furthermore, research has identified the father as a component of the family and as a person who has the potential to shape a child's well-being (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). In turn, the values of the social work profession and its long history of serving families, along with the professional commitment to ethics, create an ideal match to continue developing and advancing knowledge and practice with fathers and their attachment relationships with their children. This dissertation is an effort to begin this conversation using the DMM as a framework.

Finally, while the CARE-Index study was formulated from a DMM attachment framework to assess dyadic synchrony in mothers by exploring their interactional behaviors and patterns with their children, applying the CARE-Index to fathers' relationships builds the scholarly base to include fathers in other DMM lifespan assessments, leading to a completed FFF. As mentioned, the FFF could provide a broader view of the family and all the interactional behaviors used by each family member.

The father has historically been left out of these formulations, often because of the lack of research about fathers' inclusion in the chosen assessments at the early childhood level, especially infancy. Therefore, the focus of both qualitative studies was on positive, healthy relationships, and the interviews were designed to give fathers a voice. This dissertation reflects

positive father-child relationships and the indicators that might be used to help form early bonds between fathers and children or recognize maladaptive interactional behaviors across the lifespan using multiple sources of information from DMM assessments. This resonates optimistically with the DMM theory of attachment by Crittenden, the essence of phenomenology, and the inspiration and strengths inherent in social work.

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