

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Fathers play a critical role in child development and well-being, yet research on how men view their roles as fathers and their influence on their children's health is limited.

The present study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What are men's expectations regarding fatherhood? 2) How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers? 3) What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations? and, 4) How do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children? Data were collected via in-depth interviews with 20 fathers of pre-school aged children residing in two Oregon communities. Results suggest that role models, work schedule, mothers' roles, and their self-identity as fathers influenced participants' views of themselves as fathers and consequently their involvement in their children's lives. Fathers' sense of responsibility, either financial or emotional or both, appeared to heavily impact the ways they chose to engage with their children. While meeting physical needs of food, clothing, and shelter were discussed, for these fathers the primary indicator of children's health was happiness. They considered themselves responsible for creating a happy home environment in

which to nurture their children's mental and emotional health. All the fathers engaged in caring for their children when they were sick, including sharing specific tasks such as doctors' visits, dispensing medicine, and staying at home with the children. Findings suggest that fathers view themselves as playing an important role in promoting and protecting the health of their children.

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Fathers' Perceptions of Their Impact on Children's  
Health and Well-being: An Exploratory Study

by  
Tisa Fontaine Hill

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Tisa Fontaine Hill, Author

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I wish to dedicate this work the fathers who directly inspired this research:

My Papa, Ray Hill  
My brother, Ian Hill  
and my daughter's father, Will Kay.

And I wish to thank the fathers who so generously shared their time and experience with me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Chapter 1 – Introduction.....   | 1           |
| Research Questions.....   | 3           |
| Limitations and Implications.....                                     | 4           |
| <br>Chapter 2 – Literature Review.....                                | <br>6       |
| Theory.....   |             |
| Theoretical Grounding.....  | 6           |
| Table 1 – Ecological Model.....                                       | 6           |
| Figure 1 – Ecological Model of Fatherhood..                           | 7           |
| Table 2 – The Developmental Perspective of<br>Father Involvement..... | 9           |
| Table 3 – Research Questions and Related<br>Theories.....             | 11          |
| Figure 2 – Father Impact on Child Health<br>and Well-being.....       | 13          |
| Fatherhood, Research, and Public Health.....                          | 14          |
| Vision of Self as Father.....   | 15          |
| Conception & Intendedness.....  | 15          |
| Envisioning Fatherhood.....   | 18          |
| Envisioning Parenthood.....   | 20          |
| Activities of Fathers.....  | 21          |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Demographics & Definitions of<br>Fatherhood.....                        | 22          |
| Infant-Father Relationships.....  | 23          |
| Child-Father Relationships.....   | 25          |
| Fathers' Impact on Children's Health and<br>Well-being.....             | 31          |
| Social & Mental Health.....   | 31          |
| Physical Health.....  | 34          |
| Conclusion.....   | 36          |
| <br>Chapter 3 – Methodology.....  | <br>38      |
| Design & Rationale.....   | 38          |
| Instrument Development.....   | 40          |
| Table 4 – Interview Questions and Associated<br>Research Questions..... | 41          |
| Participant Recruitment.....  | 42          |
| Table 5 – Participant Characteristics.....                              | 44          |
| Data Collection.....  | 45          |
| Data Analysis.....  | 46          |
| <br>Chapter 4 – Results & Analysis.....                                 | <br>48      |
| Section One – Meaning of Fatherhood.....                                | 49          |



## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Table 6 – Definitions of Fatherhood.....  | 50          |
| Visions of Self as Father.....  | 51          |
| Guide and Role Model.....   | 51          |
| Responsibility.....   | 53          |
| Sacrifice.....  | 55          |
| Differences and Similarities of Fatherhood and<br>Motherhood.....                   | 55          |
| Differences.....  | 56          |
| Similarities.....   | 59          |
| Desire/Decision to Father.....  | 63          |
| Section Two – What are Men’s Expectations Regarding<br>Fatherhood?.....             | 68          |
| Excitement and Love.....  | 68          |
| Shared Activities.....  | 69          |
| Role Models.....  | 69          |
| Fears.....  | 70          |
| No Expectations.....  | 72          |
| Section Three – How Have These Expectations Changed<br>After Becoming Fathers?..... | 73          |
| Parenting is Hard!.....   | 74          |
| Change in Involvement in Children’s Lives.....                                      | 75          |

## Table 7 – Who Cares for Your Child

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

|  | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| During the Day?.....   | 75          |
| Scheduling Changes.....  | 76          |
| Table 8 – Work Schedules.....  | 76          |
| Mother’s Schedule.....   | 77          |
| Work Arrangements.....   | 77          |
| Time to Play.....  | 78          |
| Child’s Development.....   | 78          |
| Impact of Divorce.....   | 80          |
| Impact of Other Parents.....   | 80          |
| Increased Financial Responsibility.....  | 81          |
| Fatherhood Impacts Everything.....   | 82          |
| Moving to be Closer to Grandparents.....   | 83          |
| Moving to be Closer to Children.....   | 83          |
| Personal Time and Habits.....  | 84          |
| Section Four – What Factors or Role Models Shape and<br>Influence These Expectations?..... | 85          |
| Role Models for Fatherhood.....  | 85          |
| Fathers, Mothers, Step-parents, and<br>In-laws as Role Models.....                         | 85          |
| Other Family Members.....  | 88          |
| Other Families as Role Models.....   | 89          |
| Boss/Co-worker.....  | 89          |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Friends with Kids, Other Parents.....   | 90          |
| Television Characters.....  | 90          |
| Role Models for Manhood.....  | 91          |
| How Role Models Have Shaped Parenting.....  | 92          |
| Example of What Not to Do.....  | 93          |
| Influence of Wife/Partner.....  | 95          |
| Section Five – How Do Fathers Perceive Their Impact on<br>the Health and Well-being of Their Children?..... | 97          |
| Table 9 – Description of a “Healthy Child”  | 98          |
| Physical Health.....  | 101         |
| Mental/Emotional Health.....  | 104         |
| Doctor’s Visits.....  | 106         |
| Caring for Sick Children.....   | 108         |
| Chapter 5 – Discussion.....   | 109         |
| Results of Research Questions.....  | 121         |
| Conclusion.....   | 123         |
| Chapter 6 – Conclusion.....   | 125         |
| References.....   | 128         |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

|  | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| APPENDIX A – Participant Chart.....            | 133         |
| APPENDIX B – Interview Guide.....              | 135         |
| APPENDIX C – Informed Consent (In-person)..... | 140         |
| APPENDIX D – Informed Consent (Phone).....     | 143         |

# **Fathers' perceptions of their impact on children's health and well-being: An exploratory study**

## **– Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION**

In a recent national survey, 79% of Americans cited the physical absence of fathers to be the single biggest social problem facing the United States (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003). Despite this, little is known about fathers' roles, attitudes and perspectives regarding their contributions to their children's welfare (Cherlin, 1999). Societal changes that have occurred in the past 35 years, specifically those resulting from economic pressures, increased economic employment opportunities for women, and the prevalence of divorce (Bolte, Devault, St-Denis & Goudet, 2003; Sylvester, 2002), have implications for fathers' relationships with their children. In response, researchers have begun to include men in studies of fertility, childbearing, parenting and child health. In particular, fathers' impacts on children's well-being in cases of parental separation and divorce (Braver & Griffin, 2000) as well as the implications of adolescent fatherhood have received attention. What is missing from previous research is a better understanding of men's perspectives, expectations and motivations regarding their role as a father and how this affects their actions in promoting, compromising or regulating their children's health.

Previous research has shown that children benefit from father involvement (Palkovitz, 2002; Parke & Brott, 1999). This involvement begins at conception

(Fischer, Stanford, Jameson & DeWitt, 1999; Kelerman, 2000) and has lasting effects throughout childhood. In an analysis of the effects of parental disagreement over pregnancy intendedness, Sanders, Korenman, Kaestner and Joyce (2002) found that infants whose conception was intended by their mother but not their father were at increased risk for health complications. Another example is that fathers' smoking has been found to have significant impact on the birth weights of newborns of non-smoking mothers (Martinez, Wright & Toussig, 1994).

A study comparing violent and nonviolent elementary school children found that boys who received little or no affection from their fathers or male guardians were significantly more likely than other boys to engage in violent behavior at school (Sheline, Skipper & Broadhead, 1994). Additional research shows a relationship between adolescent violence and absent or uninvolved fathers (Sheline et al., 1994). Harris, Furstenberg and Marmer (1998) found paternal involvement to benefit children over the course of childhood in three important areas: educational and economic attainment, delinquent behavior, and psychological well-being.

Hernandez and Brandon (2002) argued that children's well-being and future prospects depend on the nature and quality of children's relationships with fathers as well as mothers. Recent research presents evidence that increasing the quantity of father involvement in children's lives may not be as important as increasing the quality (Palkovitz, 2002). Palkovitz defines good fathering as: "a

high degree of engagement with, accessibility to, and responsibility for children ....Good fathering entails men investing in ongoing, adaptive relationships with their children in an appropriate level (quantity) of child-centered (quality) care” (Palkovitz, p. 135, 2002). Fathers, more than mothers, engage in physical play with their children (Pleck, 1997). Children’s play with their fathers encourages exploratory and adaptive behavior in the world outside the home (Lewis, 1997). Involved fathers help children succeed in school and develop a positive self-image (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

Though an increasing body of work from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and child development reinforces the view that fathers play a critical role in child development and well-being (Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2000; Palkovitz, 2002), little research has been conducted to understand these issues from the fathers’ perspective or in the realm of public health. The present research was conducted in order to increase understanding of the social role of fatherhood and its impact on children’s health and well-being. In particular, a primary purpose of this research was to build on the relatively new body of knowledge in public health regarding fathers’ roles in children’s health.

### ***Research Questions***

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- What are men’s expectations regarding fatherhood?

- How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers?
- What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations?
- How do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children?

### *Limitations and Implications*

The study had three limitations affecting the results. First, the study included 20 participants, most of who were fathers co-habiting with their children and the children's mothers. A larger and more diverse sample may have included a wider range of experiences such as divorced fathers and fathers not residing with their children full-time. Second, due to recruitment sources participants tended to be more involved fathers than perhaps is typical of the larger society. Third, the nature of study gathered rich background and contextual data and little information on specific events or fathers perceptions over time.

Fathers interviewed in this study viewed their role as a father to be a central identity that impacted all other areas of their lives. The context of the individual family and choices made by specific mothers and fathers were seen by participants as central to the assumption and definition of the role of fatherhood. Role models play a large role in fathers' development of their role as a father. Fathers participating in this study were actively engaged in and concerned with multiple aspects of their children's lives and their children's health. Specifically,



they viewed themselves as actively responsible for their children on multiple levels, not just financial. Children's health was viewed more broadly than physical health. Fathers viewed their role as one that impacted all aspects of health – physical, mental, and emotional.

Results of this research will inform efforts aimed at involving fathers in activities benefiting children's health and well-being, such as the development of healthy habits and routine health care visits to doctors and other healthcare providers. Results also contribute to an expanded understanding of the complexities of fathers' roles in their children's lives as a whole.

## – Chapter 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theories used to frame this research study, followed by a brief reflection on the state of fatherhood research in the field of public health. Additionally, this chapter summarizes relevant literature in the following topic areas: (a) visions of self as father, (b) activities of fathers, and (c) fathers' impact on children's health.

### *Theory*

*Theoretical grounding.* Three theories informed the research project. First, the ecological theory (Bolte et al., 2003; Bronfenbrenner, 1986) provides a perspective for understanding the larger context of fatherhood. Second, Parke (2000) described the developmental perspective of fathers' dynamic and changing involvement in their children's lives. Third, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine (1987) developed a theoretical model of father involvement aimed at understanding the dimensions of engagement with children. The following discussion describes these theoretical influences in greater detail.

The first theory examined in this section, Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model, has been further adapted to focus on fatherhood (Bolte et al., 2003). According to Bolte et al. (2003), "paternal development is influenced by a

man's individual characteristics and by the environment in which he lives" (p. 15). Bolte et al. (2003) suggest that to understand these influences, a close examination of the six interlocking systems impacting the individual father should be undertaken (see Table 1 below).

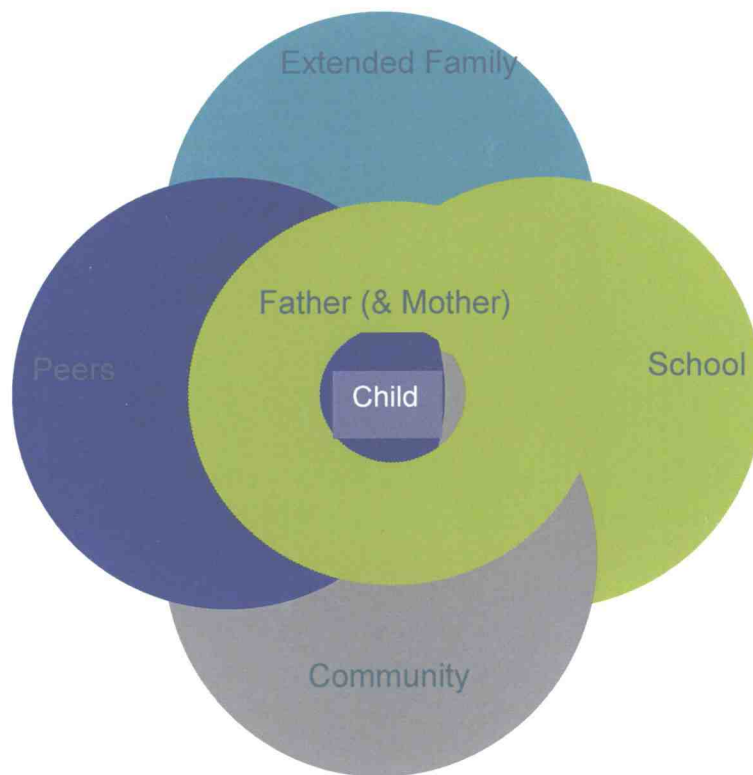
*Table 1 – Ecological Model*

| <b><i>Construct</i></b> | <b><i>Description</i></b>   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>ontosystem</b>       | the individual characteristics of the father including his past and his experiences                   |
| <b>microsystem</b>      | the father's environments, including family, work, community and spiritual, and their characteristics |
| <b>mesosystem</b>       | the concord or discord between the various components of the microsystem                              |
| <b>exosystem</b>        | the effect of public policy on the father's development   |
| <b>macrosystem</b>      | the values of the father's culture(s)   |
| <b>chronosystem</b>     | the time and context of the role of fatherhood along a father's lifespan                              |

This ecological model seeks to bring depth, nuance, and understanding to the study of fathers and the complex weave of influences on fathers' lives and actions. For example, fathers bring their experiences of their family of origin to help define their expectations or desires for the nuclear family they create as adults. Both of

these realms were and are influenced by the values of the surrounding culture and cultural experiences of the time.

Although fathers were the focus of this research, ultimately children's health and well-being were the primary outcome of interest. Figure 1 presents an alternate illustration of a key construct of the ecological model (Bolte et al., 2003) by illustrating a few of the overlapping areas of influence in the microsystem (peers, extended family, community, and school). Each sphere of influence is depicted as affecting the father (and mother) who in turn directly influence his (or her) child's experience in multiple environments.



*Figure 1. Ecological Model of Fatherhood—Microsystem*

A related conceptual framework for the study of fatherhood was developed by Parke (2000) who reviewed sociology, child development, and psychology literature to build a unified vision of the factors influencing father involvement. This theory applies to specific situations or relationships of fathers. Parke offers a detailed construction of the developmental perspective of father involvement including (1) the changing nature of the father-child relationship according to the age and/or needs of the child, (2) the timing of fatherhood in the man's life with age, lifestyle, occupation, and education each playing roles, and, (3) the resulting impacts of these factors on the child's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Parke draws on each of these areas to develop a systems view of the determinants of father involvement. Exploring this systems view was beyond the scope of this study. However, this research employed the following components of Parke's model to inform the breadth and range of factors influencing fathers and their development of fatherhood (see Table 2 next page).

*Table 2 – The Developmental Perspective of Father Involvement –*

| <b>Construct</b>                          | <b>Description</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Individual influences</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attitudes, beliefs and motivations of father</li> <li>▪ Relationship with family of origin</li> <li>▪ Timing of entry into parental role</li> <li>▪ Child gender</li> </ul> |
| <b>Family</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mother-child relationships, father-child relationships</li> <li>▪ Husband-wife relationship</li> <li>▪ Father-mother-child relationship</li> </ul>                          |
| <b>Informal support systems</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relationships with relatives</li> <li>▪ Relationships with neighbors</li> <li>▪ Relationships with friends</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Institutional or formal influences</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work-family relationships</li> <li>▪ Hospital and health care delivery systems</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Cultural influences</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Childhood cultures of boys and girls</li> <li>▪ Attitudes concerning father/mother gender roles</li> <li>▪ Ethnicity-related family values and beliefs</li> </ul>           |

As described above, Parke (2000) moves beyond the simplistic measures of presence and absence as indication of involvement in children's lives. Other researchers, such as Lamb, have sought to define the dimensions of involvement itself. The theoretical model of Lamb et al. (1987) describes three dimensions of paternal involvement: (1) engagement, (2) availability, and (3) responsibility. Engagement involves direct contact between fathers and children in activities such as caretaking and play. Availability describes a father's accessibility to the child.

even when not engaged in direct interaction. Responsibility encompasses a father's larger planning, organizing and facilitating roles in a child's life.

These theories were particularly useful in providing a framework for understanding fatherhood from a public health perspective. A particularly strong attribute of theory is its ability to allow accumulated knowledge to transfer across disciplines and areas of study, in this case by allowing literature from sociology and psychology to inform the development of new research in public health. For example, though fathers have received little attention in public health literature, the studies conducted in other fields allow public health researchers to focus on modes and areas of involvement for fathers in children's lives. From this perspective, future study can assess the relevance of general modes of involvement to specific interaction around promoting and protecting children's health and well-being.

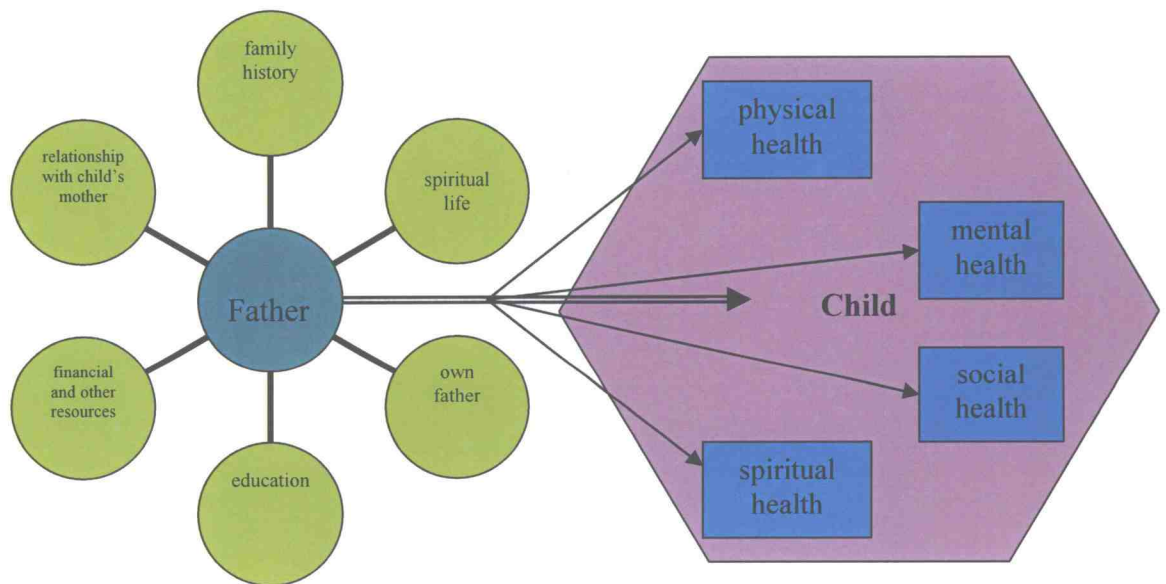
The following table (Table 3 on the next page) summarizes the relationship between the theories outlined above and the research questions guiding this study.

Table 3 – Research Questions and Related Theories

| <b>Research Question</b>   | <b>Theory</b>                      | <b>Construct(s)</b>  |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>1. What are men's expectations regarding fatherhood?</b>                                    | Ecological Model                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ontosystem</li> <li>▪ microsystem</li> <li>▪ mesosystem</li> <li>▪ macrosystem</li> <li>▪ chronosystem</li> </ul>   |
|  | Developmental Perspective          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ individual influences</li> <li>▪ family</li> <li>▪ cultural influences</li> </ul>   |
| <b>2. How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers?</b>                          | Developmental Perspective          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ individual influences</li> <li>▪ family</li> <li>▪ informal support systems</li> <li>▪ institutional or formal influences</li> <li>▪ cultural influences</li> </ul> |
|  | Dimensions of Paternal Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ engagement</li> <li>▪ availability</li> <li>▪ responsibility</li> </ul>   |
| <b>3. What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations?</b>                  | Ecological Model                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ontosystem</li> <li>▪ microsystem</li> <li>▪ macrosystem</li> </ul>   |
|  | Developmental Perspective          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ individual influences</li> <li>▪ family</li> <li>▪ cultural influences</li> </ul>   |
| <b>4. How do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children?</b> | Dimensions of Paternal Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ engagement</li> <li>▪ availability</li> <li>▪ responsibility</li> </ul>   |



The following figure [Figure 2] illustrates the complexity of the influences on the father's development in his role as a parent. In turn, the father affects the health and well-being of the child (or children) he parents through many facets, including: physical health, mental health, social health, and spiritual health. The present study examines fathers' visions of themselves and their developing role as a father, as well as fathers' perceived influence on children's social, mental, and physical health and well-being. Although viewed as an important component of health, spiritual health issues were not explored in this study.



*Figure 2 – Father Impact on Child Health & Well-being*

As mentioned during the discussion of theory, a more accurate and complex diagram would reflect not only the impact of the father upon the child's health and well-being, but would also indicate the role the child takes in shaping his or her father. While this interaction is not a focus of the current study, some of the literature reviewed addresses this dynamic relationship of father and child. Additionally, some of the data gathered during the current study alludes to this relationship.

### ***Fatherhood, Research, and Public Health***

Although the fields of sociology, child development, and family studies address father involvement in children's lives, this topic is a relatively new area of research for public health. As a result, much of the relevant literature drawn on for the study came from disciplines other than public health. According to the American Public Health Association (APHA, 2004) one of the essential purposes of public health – along with preventing and responding to epidemics, environmental hazards, and injuries – is to promote and encourage healthy behaviors and mental health. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, 1986) defined health and health promotion in the context of a human life as:

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope

with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being. (p.1)

Health begins in the home through early established patterns of relationships, healthy exercise, healthy eating, and the development of strong self-esteem and self-efficacy, and access to and use of health care systems.

Little previous research has been done in public health to ask what role a father takes in shaping the current and future well-being and health of children. The following sections of this chapter explore some of the research on fathers and children that begin to fill in this gap. The review of literature is organized under the following headings: vision of self as father, activities of fathers, and fathers' impact on children's health and well-being.

### ***Vision of Self as Father***

Previous research on men's roles as fathers provides a foundation to begin to build an understanding of fatherhood from men's perspectives. Research on the following topics is summarized below: conception and intendedness, envisioning fatherhood, and envisioning parenthood.

*Conception & Intendedness.* Some recent studies have begun exploring the impact of men on women's decisions and intentions around pregnancy. Though

these studies have been conducted with women as the primary focus, they reflect the impact of men's involvement and decision-making. Fischer et al. (1999) explored how women define the intention status of current, past, and hypothetical pregnancies. Four researchers conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews of eighteen women seeking services related to pregnancies. Attitudes of male partners were found to greatly influence how the women defined their pregnancies and approached decision making about continuing or terminating the pregnancies. All but one of the women cited their male partner as the most dominant external factor affecting how the pregnancy was defined. In particular, this meant that having a partner (married or single) and the extent to which he was excited about and supportive of the pregnancy helped define the pregnancy as wanted. Of the five women who planned to abort, none perceived their partners to be supportive of the pregnancy. Results of this study suggest that from the beginning fathers may help shape women's choices about pregnancy, and ultimately parenthood.

A related study by Zabin, Huggins, Emerson, and Cullins (2000) examined data from 250 women regarding the relationship between their intention to conceive and their current partnership. The woman had experienced a combined life-time total of 839 pregnancies. Pregnancies that ended in abortion were more than twice as likely to be not wanted with the current partner than were other pregnancies. The study concluded that future studies on pregnancy intention needed to include data on partner relationships and explore the correlation of partnerships and partner support to the desire for pregnancy. This study as well as

the study by Fischer et al. (1999) focused on women and indicated the influence of male partners on pregnancy intention and related decisions.

Grady, Tanfer, Billy and Lincoln-Hanson (1996) analyzed data from the 1991 National Survey of Men to determine men's perception around their role and their female partners' roles in decisions around sex, contraception, and child rearing. The study was informed by previous literature indicating the increased view of family planning as a joint responsibility and male-controlled methods of contraception as the preferable modes. Due to the nature of their study, Grady et al. (1996) restricted the sample to men in heterosexual relationships. The sample size was 2,526, with 958 Black and 1,568 White men. Results showed a majority of men (61%) believed women and men have equal voice in sexual decision-making. Decisions regarding contraception were also perceived to be a joint responsibility by most of the men (78%). More men believed that women had a greater influence on sexual decision making than men (30% compared to 9%) and men have a greater responsibility for contraception than women (15% compared to 7%). Additionally, most men (88%) strongly agreed with the statement that men have the same responsibilities as women for their children. Although variations exist within each of these responses based on age, ethnicity, and marital/cohabitation status, the results indicate a high level of perceived shared responsibilities by men in relation to their female partners around the issues of sex, contraception and child-rearing. Though this study examined attitudes rather than behaviors, findings suggest that men may have an important role in family

planning and reproductive health decisions and should be included in research on these decisions.

*Envisioning Fatherhood.* Although fatherhood may begin with the pregnancy and birth of a child, men's conceptualization of their roles as fathers derives from many sources. Researchers have explored some aspects of this role development. Marsiglio, Hutchinson and Cohen (2000) conducted open-ended interviews with young men (aged 17 to 26) around the concepts of fatherhood readiness and fathering visions. The men in the study (n=32) included procreative novices (n=17), abortion veterans whose partners had aborted previous pregnancies (n=11), and fathers-in-waiting whose current partners were expecting a child (n=6). Some men fit more than one category. Symbolic interactionist and life course perspective theories served to shape the data collection and analysis. The study sought to gather data to inform both theory development around men's visions of fatherhood and program development for interventions aimed at increasing father involvement in children's lives.

Marsiglio et al. (2000) identified sub-themes under fatherhood readiness and fathering visions. In exploring men's readiness for fatherhood, their results indicated that the young men spent time in both personal reflection and discussion with others. Though different events or experiences triggered these reflections, men were attentive to their perceptions and thoughts on the topic. Degree of readiness was measured in personal reflections on relationship with a person (self,

partner, and/or child) or more substantive constructs (e.g. financial stability, occupational stability, education, maturity, and time). First-hand experiences in the reproductive realm or childcare also impacted fatherhood readiness. Most respondents were fairly clear about seeing themselves as not being ready to father a child.

The study also shed light on men's visions of fathering (Marsiglio et al., 2000). These visions were collected in response to questions regarding the respondents' views of the ideal fathering experience, good fathering, and their visions of their own future action as fathers. Biological paternity was a core concern for these men and was seen as an indication of their role as an ideal father. Key features of good fathering were reported as being a good economic provider, being present and approachable, a friend, and a disciplinarian. Several men expressed visions of good fathering that could coincide with unemployment or restricted ability to provide financially. Many of the men turned to their fathers as role models, positive or negative. Visions of their fathering were also linked to visions of their future children. Some pictured specific children at specific ages, while others projected children fathered with certain mothers.

The study by Marsiglio et al. (2000) provided valuable insight into ways to frame men's perceptions and experiences around fatherhood. The researchers investigated the contextual experiences framing fatherhood and its formation in the society. The sample size is small, but the richness of the data point to key constructs that may warrant further study.

*Envisioning parenthood.* Some researchers choose to address fatherhood within the larger context of parenthood. Although previously parenthood and motherhood were often equated as one and the same (Young, 1999), some more recent work has included fathers and has begun to differentiate between mothers' and fathers' roles within parenthood. Young (1999) conducted an extensive literature review on the interaction between the changing theoretical concepts influencing parenting and parenthood and the knowledge and structures of health care. Young asserts that this changing and multidimensional view of parenting needs to be recognized and incorporated into modern health care practices.

The current trend toward examining the experiences of parents allows for "an emergent theory of parenthood as a learning journey, a journey of development towards self-definition and selfhood" (Young, 1999, p.54) that can expand to embrace the experiences of fathers as well as mothers. As Young (1999) states "The notion of parenthood as a process of learning, as a developmental journey towards selfhood, is emerging to contest the traditional notion of parenthood as a set of predefined roles" (p. 58). This definition demands a more personal and explorative development of parenthood in response to the contemporary challenges of shifting roles and responsibilities in the home and the workplace.

Additional research has probed the complex relationship between parenting couples and its impact on mothers' and fathers' constructions of their parenting



identities. Stueve and Pleck (2001) interviewed the parents (n=56 individuals, 28 married couples) of 2 to 5 year olds asking them to describe and share memories regarding their “marker” experiences (strongly meaningful positive or negative events) and “domain” experiences (everyday examples of caregiving, promoting development, breadwinning, arranging and planning, and relationship with child) as parents. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed in relation to parenting voice (uses of “I” or “we”). Data were coded into 4 specific voices – “I only,” “I context,” “we complementary,” and “we joint.” Results showed two particularly interesting consistencies across the data. Uses of “we joint” showed prominently during discussion of becoming parents. Across time this changed until contemporary events were described using “I only” voice. Additionally, both parents consistently use “I only” voice when discussing their relationship with child. This study suggests a possible change in vision of self as parent over time and in relation to the other parent.

### *Activities of Fathers*

This section describes some of the specific ways fathers interact with and involve themselves in children’s lives. To begin to understand the activities fathers engage in with and in relation to their children, one must first ask who are the fathers of today and what roles do they play in children’s lives. Following the

description of the demographics and definitions of fatherhood, father-infant attachments and father-child relationships will be discussed.

*Demographics & Definitions of Fatherhood.* According to the US Census Bureau (2002) 72,321,000 children live in the United States. Almost 69% of these children live with both parents. Of the children under 15 years of age living with two parents, 29% had a stay-at-home parent (Fields, 2003). Mothers accounted for 97% of these stay-at-home parents, while 3% were fathers (Fields, 2003). Many children live in single-parent households with 22.8% living with their mothers only and 5% living with their fathers only. These statistics mask the number of children who live with step-fathers rather than biological fathers and also give little indication of children's relationships with both biological fathers and men who fill a father role in a child's life who are not in residence (Hernandez & Brandon, 2002).

The various terms used to describe fathers provide an added dimension to the complexities of current child-father relationship in the United States. Fathers are referred to variously as biological fathers, social fathers, step-fathers, fathers-in-waiting, and foster parents. Fathers can be defined by a biological relationship or by the role a man plays in the life of a child. For the purpose of this study, two different concepts of fatherhood are combined. First, the definition of fathering as established by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (1998) states "it covers the activities and behaviors of a biological father toward

his child and the actions and activities that lead to and are related to becoming a father – male fertility and family formation” (Chapter 1). Second, Palkovitz (2002) extends the concept of fatherhood by including both biological and social aspects.

Independent of disciplinary boundaries, fathers are only fathers because of relationships. A man becomes a biological father as a result of a relationship to the child’s birth mother. Biological fathering is the result of a biological act with differing degrees of planning, intentionality, emotion, and commitment across different relationships. However, becoming a social father, making the transition to fatherhood, is a different process, entailing different functions and dynamics. A father is only a social father in relation to a child (p.121, Palkovitz).

The present study built on the commonalities between these definitions, asking men to define themselves as fathers.

*Infant-Father Attachments.* Previous research generally focused on mother-infant relationship development and excluded fathers. Over the past decade research has begun to paint a picture of the emotional engagement of fathers with their infants. Deater-Deckard, Scarr, McCartney and Eisenberg (1994) conducted research with fathers of young children, exploring their experience of separation anxiety when apart from the infants. Married couples (n=589) with at least one child age 1-5 years were recruited through childcare facilities in Massachusetts, Virginia, and Georgia. The couples were predominantly white (90%) and of upper-middle class income with advanced education levels. One-on-one interviews of mothers and fathers were conducted in

the family homes; each parent was interviewed separately while the other parent completed a series of self-rated measures. Additionally, the quality of the daycare centers attended by the children was rated by researchers visiting each daycare site.

The questionnaires administered to fathers and mothers focused on their concern for their child, their level of separation anxiety, their concerns related to employment issues, and their perception of their spouses' level of concern on all three scales (Deater-Deckard et al., 1994). Results indicated that fathers had significantly higher levels of concerns regarding their children than mothers. Fathers also had high levels of separation anxiety but the results were not significantly higher than for mothers. Mothers had higher scores on employment concerns. Fathers believed mothers to be more anxious than themselves on all three scales. Fathers with higher separation anxiety had more traditional child-rearing values and perceived higher separation anxiety than their wives. Higher maternal separation anxiety was associated with having only one child, a lower education level, greater parenting stress, and more traditional child-rearing values. The research found no correlation between the level of separation anxiety for either parent and the quality of the childcare center.

Deater-Deckard et al. (1994) suggested that the correlation between fathers' separation anxieties and their perception of their spouse's separation anxiety warrants further study. Additionally, the researchers extrapolated that the changes in societal expectations and family structures in recent decades may have

triggered fathers and mothers both feeling anxieties related to children (such as separation anxiety) that in the past mothers have borne alone.

*Child-Father Relationships.* Aldus, Mulligan and Bjarnson (1998)

analyzed data from two phases of the National Survey of Families and Households to determine the impact of various factors on fathers' time spent in care giving activities with children. The study hypothesized that fathers would be more active in childcare (a) when mothers' employment outside of the home increased and (b) if they had more egalitarian ideologies regarding gender roles. These hypotheses were based on two theories – human-capital theory and gender-roles ideology theory. Human-capital theory asserts that couples strive to maximize household efficiency by assigning tasks to each spouse relative to what they do best and to how much they contribute financially to the family. Therefore, husbands who provide financial support to the household are asked to assume responsibility for fewer household chores. Gender-role ideology grows out of the concept that gender norms influence beliefs about appropriate task allocation by gender.

A wide range of variables – including performance of household tasks, marital quality, gender role ideologies, perceptions of fairness in division of household tasks, mothers' childcare hours, mothers' and fathers' hours of paid employment, and earned incomes of both parents – were analyzed (Aldus et al., 1998). Participants (n=762 couples) all resided in two parent families with at least

one child under 5 at the time of first survey (1987-1988), and parents were continuously married from first survey to second. All families were White.

Results from Time 1 (1987-1988) showed fathers spent 2.3 hours per day taking care of their child's physical needs while mothers spent 5.9 hours per day on average. The time spent caregiving was associated with time spent in employment outside the house with fathers working an average of 44 hours a week and mothers less than 20 hours per week. More educated fathers spent less time caring for children. Fathers with stronger egalitarian ideologies spent more time in caretaking. Results showed no relationship between mothers' income and fathers' caretaking. Results from Time 2 (1992-1993) showed less time overall being spent in caretaking by both parents (fathers 2.3 hours per week, mothers 4.5 hours per week). Fathers spent on average 4 hours per week engaged in activities with the children and mothers spent 6 hours per week on average; this difference held when both parents were employed full-time. Additionally, in both cases childcare was related to involvement in other household activities. After examining the data over time, less caregiving at Time 1 meant less caregiving at Time 2. Fathers of older children were more supportive of egalitarian ideology and more able to recognize unfairness of the distribution of household tasks; however, in contrast to Time 1, this support and recognition did not correspond to increased levels of childcare. The researchers suggested that the key to lifelong father involvement is early involvement.

A study by Fagot and Kavanagh (1993) examined changes in child development and parent-child relationships during a child's second year. A combination of interviews, questionnaires and in-home observations compared the interactions of two cohorts of parents and their responses to Ainsworth's Strange Situation, a staged interaction between researchers, parents, and children. The cohorts of children ( $n=67$  and  $n=70$ ) were enrolled at 16 months of age and 11 months of age respectively. Their parents lived in the Eugene-Springfield area of Oregon and represented a wide range of incomes. The majority of participants were White (95%) with additional participants with race/ethnicity of Black, Hispanic, Asian and South Pacific Islander. More than half the children (68%) were only children.

Initial interviews were conducted with both parents in the family homes. Two weeks later mothers brought the children into the laboratory for additional data collection. During the following two weeks 4 hour observations were conducted in the family homes. At the end of the two weeks, the parents were given questionnaires about their children's behavior. Results showed that both mothers and fathers were more comfortable with their roles as parents of 12-month-old children than 18-month-old children. They found more pleasure in the younger children. The researchers (Fagot and Kavanagh, 1993) suggested that this change may result from the developmental changes in children that demand a responsive change in parenting roles and skills of both mothers and fathers. This

study was unusual in that both mothers and fathers were included equally in the research on parenting.

Hofferth, Steuve, Pleck, Bianchi, and Sayer (2002) analyzed results from three large national surveys – the Panel Study of Income Dynamics – Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS); the 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM); and the 1998 Family Interaction, Social Capital, and Trends in Time Use study – looking for data on father involvement in children's lives. Hofferth et al. (2002) found that results of all three surveys were comparable across several areas. The surveys all indicated that fathers spent from 3 to 4.5 hours a day in direct contact with or available to children. The relative time spent in caring for children varied across type of paternal relationship. Biological fathers were found to spend the most time with children, step-fathers the least and co-habiting partners of mothers somewhere in the middle. These variations were projected to be affected by investment of father in child, relationship between father-figure and child's mother, and the existence of additional children to whom the father may be devoting time and attention. In addition to analyzing the data for time expenditure with children, the warmth of the father-child relationships was also examined. Warmth was again strongest between biological fathers and their children, however, step-fathers and co-habiting fathers showed similar levels of warmth to children. Differences were also observed in the monitoring and control roles of fathers, with biological fathers rating the highest and co-habiting fathers the lowest. All three surveys indicated type of mother-father relationship affects



the father-child relationship. Fathers have primary financial responsibility for children; mothers fill primary caregiving roles. Across the surveys, roles shared by mothers and fathers included playing with children, emotional support, monitoring, and discipline.

Hirshberg and Svejda (1990) conducted a study of the social referencing reactions to emotional cues of infants to their parents. Participants were 12 month olds ( $n=66$ ). The mothers were generally the primary caregivers for the infants. The social referencing of the infants was documented comparing three conditions – both parents available and with neutral expressions, one parent at a time in successive episodes with one parent giving a positive signal (happy) and the other giving a negative signal (fear), and finally both parents available and giving conflicting signals (happy versus fearful). Each child was exposed to all three conditions. Results showed no significant difference in the infants' social referencing of mothers and fathers. The results suggest that both parents are a significant source of emotional guidance. The only significant difference occurred in relation to comfort-seeking behaviors. Infants preferentially sought proximity to mothers over fathers when highly stressed.

McBride, Schoppe, and Rane (2002) conducted a study examining the relationship between parental stress (both mothers and fathers analyzed separately) and parents' perceptions of child temperament. The following research questions were asked: (1) What is the relationship between parents' perception of child temperament and parent stress? (2) What is the relationship between parents'

perceptions of child temperament and participation in childrearing activities and do these associations differ for mothers and fathers?, and (3) Does gender play an independent or interactive role with child temperament in relation to parenting stress and involvement? Participants (n=100) were from White, middle class families in the Midwest. The older child in the family was between 3 and 5 years of age. Both biological parents lived in the home. Data were collected using a combination of self-reports and interviews. Results suggested parents found children with less emotional expression to be less challenging. Differential stress levels for parents were found in opposite sex parent-child relationships (father-daughter and mother-son dyads) compared to same-sex parent-child relationships (father-son and mother-daughter). Other differences according to gender of parent and child were observed. More sociable children were less stressful for fathers, but not for mothers. Less active daughters, but not less active sons were associated with less involved fathers, though this parallel did not hold true for mother involvement. The results showed significant associations between patients' perceptions of child's temperament, the relationship between these perceptions and parents' participation in child rearing activities, and the gender of the parent and child.

### ***Fathers' Impacts on Children's Health & Well-being***

*Social & Mental Health.* Because of the nature of previous studies, the discussions of social and mental health have been combined in this section.

Sheline, Skipper and Broadhead (1994) conducted a study to investigate risk factors of violent behavior in low-income elementary school boys. Boys (n=17) from a low-income, predominantly Hispanic neighborhood school were selected for inclusion in the study based on receiving two or more infraction notices for violent misbehaviors during the first term of the school year. Controls were matched according to teacher, sex, ethnicity, and age with two controls selected for every case (n=27). Questionnaires were filled out by all students at the school (n=530). Questionnaires and interviews were conducted for cases and controls in homes by interviewers who were blind to enrollment status. Results indicated that boys with violent misbehaviors were 11 times more likely not to live with their fathers and 6 times more likely to have unmarried parents. Additionally, their fathers were significantly more likely to never show physical affection or pride. This trend held true for male guardians as well. Primary caretakers of these children were significantly more likely to rarely or never express pride or affection for the child and more likely to use spanking for discipline at home. This research draws a connection between boy's behaviors and their relationship with their fathers or father figures.

In a related study, Carson and Parke (1996) investigated the impact of parent-child interactions on children's peer relationships. Participants included 4 and 5 year olds (n=41) and their parents. The children lived with two parents and were predominantly White (n=37). The children were recruited for the study from local childcare and pre-school facilities. Measures included teacher completed measures of child competency with peer relationships and observations of parent-child interactions during separate mother-child and father-child visits to the laboratory. Parent-child interactions during a "hand game" taught by the researchers were recorded on video and coded for facial expression using the following categories: happy, laughter, surprise, humor, apologetic, praise, pout/whine, anger, tease, mock, boredom, and neutral. Pout/whine, anger, tease, mock, and boredom were all grouped as negative affects. Results showed that when fathers were more likely to respond with negative affect to children displaying a negative affect: (a) children shared less, (b) were more verbally aggressive, (c) avoided others, and (d) tended to be more physically aggressive. Parents (both mothers and fathers) with negative affects tended to have children with negative affects. Researchers suggested that parents had a strong influence in children's ability to regulate negative emotions during their interactions with others. Fathers in particular contributed to this pattern as they were more likely to respond to negative affects of children with a negative affect of their own.

More recent research examined fathers' impacts on children's social interactions with others. McDowell, Kim, O'Neil and Parke (2002) hypothesized

that fathers' behaviors would show a stronger relation to children's emotional regulation and social competence than would the behaviors of mothers'. Research was conducted through observations of parents' emotional socialization behaviors in interactions with children and children's self-reports of emotionality and coping skills. Participants were fourth graders ( $n=103$ ) who were enrolled in an on-going longitudinal study. The children attended nine different elementary schools, were middle class, 50% White, 40% Latino, and 10% African American or other ethnicity. Teachers completed a 12-item classroom behavior inventory for each child. Results suggested that only when the fathers express blame do children react with less positive emotional functioning.

Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, and Taylor (2003) carried out a study of the impact of fathers with antisocial behavior on the social development of their children. The study grew from the researchers questioning the universality of the belief that two parent families are best for children. The three goals of the study were: (1) to describe fathers in an epidemiological sample who engage in low and high levels of antisocial behavior, (2) to determine if the effects of father presence are uniform across families, and (3) to question if children of men with antisocial behavioral histories were at genetic and/or environmental risk for development of behavioral problems. Participants were drawn from a larger longitudinal study of twins born in 1994 and 1995 in the United Kingdom. The subset of the sample pulled for inclusion in this study included twins of the same sex whose mothers were age 20 or younger at the time of first childbirth. A researcher interviewed mothers in their

homes while the twins were tested by another researcher. Results indicated that when fathers exhibited high levels of antisocial behavior, children also had increased levels of antisocial behavior. This relationship was significantly magnified if the father also lived in the home. Results also indicated that the risk doubled for development of anti-social behavior disorder if both genetic and environmental origins existed for the children researched. Implications of the research included that the quality of parenting was more important than living in a two parent family, and therefore pro-marriage policies are not necessarily the best thing for all children. Several possible limitations of the study were observed. One, behavioral problems were measured at a single point in time and effects may change over time. Two, twins may have more stressful families than singletons. And, finally, the data on fathers were provided by mothers and not fathers.

*Physical Health.* Fathers concur with physicians and the children's mothers regarding needs of children with chronic health conditions. Additionally, fathers affect children's physical health through both direct environmental factors and through the development of life-long habits.

Perrin, Lewkowitz and Young (2000) studied the degree of agreement among fathers, mothers and physicians regarding the number and types of services needed to address children's chronic health conditions. A population (n=234) of children in central Massachusetts were identified as receiving care for chronic health conditions from pediatricians who agreed to participate in the study. Of

these, 167 enrolled in the study by completing the preliminary paperwork. Ages of participants ranged from 2 months to 15 years. Chronic health conditions included multiple conditions, primarily respiratory conditions and a range of "other" conditions. Just under half the children were female and the socioeconomic class of participants was primarily middle-class. Questionnaires administered to the father, mother, and physician treating each child asked each to identify the needs of the child and to indicate whether or not these needs were being met. There was a high level of concordance among all three regarding the contact, counseling, and specific health needs of the child. Significant disagreement was found between the physician and both the father and mother on information needs. Additionally, mothers indicated more contact needs than either the physician or the father. Results of this study suggest that mothers and fathers both tend to perceive more unmet needs for children with chronic health conditions than the physicians. Mothers and fathers share most perceptions of unmet needs with some discordance occurring around need for social support and social contact regarding the chronic health condition.

Sandler, Everson, Wilcox, and Browdler (1985) asked if cancer risk in adults is related to transplacental or childhood passive exposure to cigarette smoke. Subjects were drawn from the cancer registry at the North Carolina Memorial Hospital. Eligible cases were cancer patients 59 years old and younger (n=518) and comparisons were friends of cases who did not have cancer but matched other demons. Questionnaires were mailed to individual's homes.

Results showed a stronger relationship between fathers' smoking during pregnancy and childhood than for mothers' smoking for predicting cancer later in life. Brain cancer had a particularly strong correlation.

The following research addresses how children develop healthy habits and how fathers' health and habits impact their children. Blecke (1990) conducted ethnographic research on children's health-related learning in the family, noting in particular their health and self-care behavior and how parents' passed on their habits to their children. One family consisting of mother, father, son, and daughter participated in the study. The researcher conducted interviews with the family during 10 visits over a 5 and a half week period, with each visit lasting between 1 and 3 hours. Health issues listed in order of importance to the family included: nutrition, physical activity, sleep/rest, cleanliness, care of teeth, elimination, safety, appropriate dress, and avoidance of smoking/drinking. The research suggested that children's health behaviors are modeled by parents and then incorporated into children's habits by practice and repetition. An obvious limitation of this study was the number of participants (one family with mother, father, and two children) making extrapolation to a larger community.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter outlined theoretical models developed for research on fatherhood, the current state of public health research on fathers, and previous



research on fatherhood and children's health and well-being from a variety of fields. Clearly, much research is still needed to fill gaps in understanding regarding the roles fathers play in children's health.

Previous research has struggled with methodological issues of studying fathers. In the past mothers, rather than fathers, have provided data on fathers and father's actions (Young, 1999), or fathers have been asked the same questions as mothers without first determining if the questions apply equally well to fathers as well as mothers (Young, 1999). Research must begin to address the bias inherent in these previous methodologies. One way to do this is to research fathers themselves, asking them to describe their own experiences. When this bias has been corrected research can then be conducted to effectively describe fathers' roles in children's health and well-being.

### **– Chapter 3 – METHODOLOGY**

The methodological approach the author used provided fathers with an opportunity to explore and define fatherhood from their own experiences and perspectives. This study was based on three theoretical frameworks: Bronfenbrenner (1986) and Bolte's (2003) ecological theory; Parke's (2000) developmental perspective of father involvement; and, Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine's (1987) model of father involvement aimed at understanding the dimensions of their engagement with children. Data were collected by means of in-depth, one-on-one interviews with fathers (n=20) of pre-school aged children residing in two Oregon communities. Data were analyzed using a two-part coding and categorizing system developed by Charmaz (1987). This chapter outlines the study's methodology, including design and rationale, instrument development, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The Institutional Review Board of Oregon State University approved this research prior to participant recruitment.

#### ***Design & Rationale***

Qualitative research, the general methodological approach used in designing this study, implies an emphasis on qualities, processes and meanings

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In particular, qualitative researchers “stress the socially constructed nature of reality” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 13) and by emphasizing “the value laden nature of inquiry....seek to answer questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, date, p. 13). Fatherhood is by its very nature socially constructed (Tanis-LeMonda & Camera, 2002) and lacks meaning or understanding outside of the social setting and reality in which it is placed. Fatherhood derives its context and meaning from the child, family, and community in which it is nestled. Additionally, fathers construct their roles internally by the self-identity of the individual man and his understanding of his role as a father (Tanis-LeMonda & Camera, 2002).

Qualitative interviewing involves more than a specific set of skills. It is also a philosophy of and approach to learning (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Such interviews “encourage people to describe their worlds in their own terms” (Rubin & Rubin, p. 2, 1995), build a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee with obligations on both sides, and provide standards by which to judge the quality of research as well as its completeness and accuracy.

The present study generated a rich, broad, and practical understanding of fathers’ subjective experiences (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2000). Data collection occurred through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with fathers of pre-school age children. Interviewing fathers provided the researcher an opportunity to explore and define fatherhood from the men’s own experiences and perspectives. Data collected using this style of research captured with the fathers’ own words: (a) the

individual's point of view, (b) the constraints of everyday life, and (c) rich descriptions of life experiences.

### ***Instrument Development***

Interview questions included in the interview guide were created from the literature and the research questions, and they were informed by theory. Their content included the role of fathers, expectations of fatherhood, activities engaged in with children, and father involvement in children's health and well-being. The questions were open-ended and designed to solicit detailed responses regarding the men's expectations and experiences as fathers. Probes used as follow up questions encouraged greater depth in responses when deemed necessary by the researcher. Several of the questions elicited responses relevant to more than one research question. Some questions were revised to accommodate new directions taken during a particular interview, such as modifications for instances when fathers did not have primary custody of their children. Additional questions were asked to fill obvious gaps in information. (Please see Appendix A for a complete copy of the interview guide.) The following table, Table 4, presents the interview questions tied to each of the research questions.

*Table 4 – Interview Questions Associated with Research Questions*

| Research Questions  | Interview Questions  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>What are men's expectations regarding fatherhood?</b></p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe what fatherhood means to you.</li> <li>▪ How is fatherhood different from motherhood? Or is it?</li> <li>▪ What did you expect being a father would be like?</li> <li>▪ Did you always plan/want to be a father?</li> <li>▪ What does it mean to you to be capable of fathering?</li> <li>▪ How has being a parent impacted your other decisions?</li> <li>▪ Were you ready to parent when you became a father?</li> <li>▪ I asked this question at the beginning of the interview, I'm wondering if you have anything to add after thinking about being a father for the past ____ minutes. Describe what fatherhood means to you.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers?</b></p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe what fatherhood means to you.</li> <li>▪ How is fatherhood different from motherhood? Or is it?</li> <li>▪ How has your involvement in your child's life changed over time?</li> <li>▪ How has being a parent impacted your other decisions?</li> <li>▪ How has your parenting changed over time?</li> <li>▪ I asked this question at the beginning of the interview, I'm wondering if you have anything to add after thinking about being a father for the past ____ minutes. Describe what fatherhood means to you.</li> <li>▪ What do you expect being a father will be like in your future?</li> </ul>                                     |
| <p><b>What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What did you expect being a father would be like?</li> <li>▪ Who are/were your parenting role models?</li> <li>▪ How have your role models shaped how you parent?</li> <li>▪ Did anyone teach you how to parent?</li> <li>▪ Has your family supported you as a father? If so, how?</li> <li>▪ How has the community supported you as a father?</li> </ul>   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>How do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What activities do you engage in with your child?</li> <li>▪ What kinds of play do you engage in with your child?</li> <li>▪ What kinds of activities is/are your child involved in?</li> <li>▪ Who facilitates these activities?</li> <li>▪ Who cares for your child during the day?</li> <li>▪ Do you read to your child? Do you do other activities with your child to help prepare him/her for school?</li> <li>▪ Describe a “healthy child.”</li> <li>▪ Is your child healthy? How do you know?</li> <li>▪ How do you see yourself affecting your child’s health?</li> <li>▪ Who takes the child to well-baby check-ups?</li> <li>▪ Who cares for your child when s/he is sick?</li> <li>▪ Can you give me an example of a time your child was injured or sick? What happened and how was your child cared for? Who decided how to care for the child?</li> <li>▪ What is the impact of fatherhood on your own health/well-being?</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

### ***Participant Recruitment***

Participants (n=20) were recruited in Corvallis and Eugene, Oregon through the Corvallis Montessori School (n=7), posters hung in locations families frequent (n=3) (including libraries, grocery stores, apartment complexes, and recreational facilities), parenting groups (n=5), and continued efforts at snowball sampling following initial contacts (n=5). Recruitment of participants ended when a saturation point was reached. This saturation point was evident when participants’ responses no longer brought new information. To be eligible to participate in the study, men had to meet the following criteria: (1) over 25 years

old, (2) have a young child (aged birth to 6 years), but could have multiple children of other ages, and (3) speak English (due to language restriction of interviewer). Due to the topic of the study, only men were recruited as participants. Other demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, marital status, and socio-economic status varied among participants and were not used as inclusion or exclusion criteria. In an attempt to capture diversity of experience, efforts were made to recruit fathers (1) who do not live with their children, (2) whose partners work outside of the house, or (3) with very young children. However, this approach had limited success. Three divorced men or separated men were interviewed. In each of these cases the mother had primary custody of the children from that relationship. In one case, the father had re-partnered and had another child with his current partner. Five of the fathers had wives who worked full-time outside the home. An additional four mothers worked part-time. Also, one mother was enrolled in school part-time. Two of the three ex-wives worked full-time with the third receiving disability. Half the fathers (n=10) had children aged two years or younger. Most of the men (n=17) were White. Two of the participants were Latino and one was from the Caribbean. (Please see Appendix A for a more detailed table of participant characteristics). In the results, participants will be referred to by their assigned pseudonym and relevant characteristics will be noted.

*Table 5 – Participant Characteristics*

| <b>Characteristic</b> |                       | <b>Number of participants*</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Age                   | 25-30                 | 5                              |
|                       | 31-35                 | 4                              |
|                       | 36-40                 | 7                              |
|                       | 40+                   | 4                              |
| Number of children    | 1                     | 8                              |
|                       | 2                     | 8                              |
|                       | 3                     | 4                              |
| Age of children       | <1                    | 7                              |
|                       | 1-3                   | 6                              |
|                       | 4-6                   | 14                             |
|                       | 7+                    | 9                              |
| Location              | Corvallis (Albany)    | 10                             |
|                       | Eugene                | 10                             |
| Ethnicity             | White                 | 17                             |
|                       | Latino                | 2                              |
|                       | Caribbean             | 1                              |
| Marital status        | Partnered/Co-habiting | 4                              |
|                       | Married               | 16                             |
|                       | Divorced/Separated    | 3                              |
| Families of origin    | Parents together      | 6                              |
|                       | Parents divorced      | 13                             |
|                       | Father deceased       | 2                              |

(\*Total N of participants = 20)

At the Corvallis Montessori School letters describing the study and asking fathers' willingness to be interviewed were distributed to all families of children attending the center. The letters provided contact information for the student researcher. Additionally, recruitment flyers announcing the study were posted around the childcare center. Other recruitment sites (libraries, grocery stores, apartment complexes, recreational facilities, and parenting groups) received recruitment flyers to hang in prominent public areas.



The recruitment poster provided contact information for the researcher. Interested fathers contacted the student researcher by phone. During this phone call the study was described, eligibility criteria outlined, confidentiality issues discussed, and the father indicated his interest in being interviewed. The content of the informed consent document, including procedures, compensation, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were reviewed during the phone call. If the father met the eligibility criteria and expressed an interest in participating in the study, an interview time was established.

### ***Data Collection***

When possible, interviews occurred at the convenience of the participant at a public location that allowed for private conversation. Some of the interviews (n=11) were conducted by phone rather than in person. When the interview took place in person, and before the interview occurred, participants signed the written informed consent document [see Appendix C & D]. When the interview occurred by phone the researcher sent consent forms by mail or email prior to the phone call. All the interviews were conducted by the student researcher. The participants were provided with the phone number and e-mail of the student researcher to contact if any questions or concerns arose throughout this process.

Interviews lasted between 40 and 120 minutes. The researcher took notes during the interviews as well as audio taped all interviews. Some interviews were

completed in person, while others were conducted via phone. In-person interviews took place in public locations, such as study rooms in the Valley Library and local coffee shops. Audiotapes were transcribed by the researcher and then destroyed to protect confidentiality. There were 208 total pages of transcribed text from the twenty interviews. After transcription, all subjects were assigned pseudonyms and their contact information was destroyed.

### ***Data Analysis***

After transcribing the interviews, the verbatim transcripts were reviewed three times before any initial notes or codes were made on the data. The researcher used a process of analytic coding suggested by Charmaz (1987, as cited in Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The data were coded using two stages of analytic coding, the initial coding stage and the focused coding stage, to categorize the data (Charmaz, 1987 cited in Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

The initial coding stage involved identifying main themes through a process of coding responses to interview questions. The researcher then counted these responses for frequency. Particularly illustrative quotes, as well as unusual or poignant ones were highlighted. These codes and quotes were then compiled into a single document. Once in a single document, the researcher gathered these codes under relevant research questions. Focused coding allowed the researcher to identify themes associated with relevant research questions and isolate quotes that

illustrated particular points or provided contrast. Themes were recoded during focused coding into the appropriate overarching themes. Sub-themes were developed and coded according to their appropriateness within each of the overarching themes. This process of initial coding and focused coding allowed the patterns and themes to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Teaster, 2002).

After using the data to answer the research questions, the data was further examined to identify any additional or unforeseen patterns of response from the participants. The researcher uncovered several themes that went beyond the research questions. These additional findings were summarized and relevant quotes selected to illustrate these themes.

In the following chapter, results of the research will be presented according to the study's research questions, and additional themes found in coding the data will be briefly noted. This presentation of data will allow the researcher to provide a context for a discussion of fathers' impacts on child health and well-being.

## **-- Chapter 4 -- RESULTS**

Some of the data collected, though not in direct response to the author's research questions, provides an appropriate context for reviewing the results of the study's main research questions. The men spoke not just of their expectations, role models, and involvement in their children's health, but also of their visions of themselves as fathers, the similarities and differences of fatherhood and motherhood, and the decision to become a father. As this was an exploratory study, this kind of contextualization of the experience of fatherhood was one aim of the study. In order to convey the richness of these data and adequately frame the response to the four research questions themselves, the additional data are presented first in Section One of this chapter under the overarching theme of the "meaning of fatherhood." Sections Two through Five follow, each presenting results to the research questions framing the study. Section Two presents results related to the question: "What are men's expectations regarding Fatherhood?" Section Three presents the data on "How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers?" Section Four reports out responses to "What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations?" Finally, Section Five summarizes the respondents' views of "How do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children?"

**-- Section One --**  
**Meaning of Fatherhood**

At the beginning of each interview fathers were offered a chance to describe "fatherhood." Many participants responded by offering a wide range of activities, attributes, and experiences they associate with fatherhood. Before presenting this information, Table 6 presents a few quotes, illustrating the range of comments made. Fathers struggled to capture both the expanse and the essence of their experience of fatherhood. This study sought to achieve just this kind of wide ranging and descriptive responses by fathers.

Additional data on participants' concepts of the "meaning of fatherhood" follows Table 6, summarized by three key themes and several sub-themes. This section of results addresses men's vision of self as father, differences and similarities of fatherhood and motherhood, and their desire or decision to father.

Table 6 – Definitions of fatherhood

| <b>Definitions of Fatherhood</b>  |
|---|
| <p>I think fatherhood in some ways is kind of, I think this is tainted in some ways with my development, but in a way I think it's kind of a death of an identity and it's a rebirth of a new identity. So, I kind of think of the phoenix in a way. I think parenthood in general there is this process by which you kind of grieve the loss of things that you held dear to you and that that's a normal and natural process. You have to let go of those things in order to make room for this new relationship that you're going to have with your children. And that by doing that the values change, but the foundation of your values stays the same. But the way that they play throughout your life changes. And if you don't do that, you can't be a good parent. (Tom, divorced father of two children ages 4 and 7)</p>                                     |
| <p>It's a wonderful thing. I think it's the ultimate goal for a man to achieve that, have a good family. There's so much surrounded about career and all that good stuff when I think this is more important to me than money or career or whatever else. To me this is like the final step for me of being successful. (Ari, married father of two children ages 10 months and 4 years)</p>  |
| <p>Something positive, something different than the traditional patriarchal society that we live in. So, the more emotional male, the more sensitive, the more emotionally mature and all that. Just kind of breaking down some of the gender roles as much as possible so that, you know, we're human, but at the same time we are male and female and defining that in a positive way rather than in any oppressive way. Fatherhood, okay, it's kind of something that's bestowed upon you just as I think that motherhood is. It's kind of a role. There's lots of different traditional ideas attached to it. I think it's kind of a constant questioning and re-questioning of all those traditional values to don that suit if you will, or not. Let's see, fatherhood, there's a huge amount of nurturing. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)</p> |
| <p>Um, I would add that it is an ongoing process. It's different today than it was yesterday and tomorrow it will be different again. The ability to adapt and evolve is a very important ability and a hallmark of being a good dad. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)</p>   |
| <p>I guess in my theory of life, the exact same things of being capable of fatherhood are pretty much the same things as being a good person. I think with the exception that with fatherhood you are trying to raise somebody versus just being on your own. I think they are fairly intertwined. You want a description of, I guess a description of a good person is ideally the description of who I want to be or who I strive to be. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)</p>   |
| <p>I guess I didn't mention sort of the fun aspect of it, which is difficult to describe exactly how it is fun in a way that you can relate too, other than having done it I understand exactly what you mean, but I can't say exactly how it was fun. I guess that's the thing I'd like to add, well, its part of fatherhood, the enjoyment of being a father. I don't know if that's like meta-fathering or something, but I mean the act of interacting with them and how it changes you, or me. And I think to some degree it helps make me a better person, because I think about interacting with him and the joy and happiness of just being. So, that's something that I didn't mention. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)</p>   |
| <p>Personally, as a kid I wanted to be a mother. (Laughter) That's what I wanted to be when I grew and I realized I couldn't be a mother, but I could be a father and try to make that definition for myself what that meant. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)</p>   |

### *Vision of self as father*

When asked what

“fatherhood” means, the fathers most frequently spoke of guiding their children’s development (n=14), acting as a role model (n=11), being responsible (n=27), and sacrificing for their children (n=10).

#### ***Meaning of Fatherhood***

Themes:

- ❖ vision of self as father
  - guide and role model
  - responsibility
  - sacrifice
- ❖ differences and similarities of fatherhood and motherhood
  - differences
  - similarities
- ❖ desire/decision to father

*Guide and role model.* Fathers’ notions of guiding development

encompassed many actions including teaching, providing tools for success, helping to develop a moral base, encouraging growth, and instilling virtues and values.

The following quotes illustrated this theme:

I feel like it’s just a presence of being there. I feel like it’s an example I need to set and kind of be there to give them encouragement and to be there to help direct them, but, you know, not too much. I think mostly to be an example. This is what you need to do...that’s always been our thing, especially when Michael was younger...we never told him to do something unless we would explain it too him. It was always, this is what you need to do to be a better person. You can’t hit other people...you can’t throw toys in the sandbox because good people don’t that. So, I guess that’s it. Being an example and helping to give him direction to grow up. Be grown ups. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

That’s a lot of power and a lot of power of influence and a lot of energy that you get to share with your child, but its a lot of responsibility. To me it really was just about what I could teach, what I can pass on. Of course, I

want my children to do better than I did and the more I can teach and the more I can let them see my experiences in life, then hopefully the less that they have to struggle through those same struggles that I had. Hopefully we can come to a high enough level of trust and understanding that they can accept some of the things that I am teaching them without having to stumble through the same trials that I went through. For me it really is about teaching and about watching them grow. It's symbiotic. I feel like I give to her as much as she gives back to me. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

Fatherhood I think means being a mentor or an educator. It seems like the role of fathers is to kind of teach and mentor. Fatherhood means you have to be kind of a judge, you know, in the sense of you have to like have a morale foundation in order to be a judge and be a protector for your child and also a guidance for your child as well as they grow. (Tony, married father of one child age 10 months)

In related responses, several fathers (n=4) spoke of helping their child or children grow to be productive and helpful members of society. This value was clearly very important to many of the fathers and served to give direction to their guidance and support of their children. For example:

Um, what it means to me ... well, it means I am responsible for another person, for helping form and guide that person into greater society. There is a moral obligation there as well as a societal one. I have to give that person the tools he/she needs to be a productive member of society and cope with its vagaries. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

I would like to instill in them that we can go through our lives and be helpful members of society and conscious global inhabitants and...I would just like them to be well-rounded. I just want to leave that legacy that they could say after I'm gone or whatever, okay, my dad taught me these things and this is something that he learned that I would like bring out and share with the world and hopefully make something better. (Jason, married father of two children ages 3 and 6)

Acting as a role model referred to the father setting an example for his children both male and female. As indicated above, several fathers focused this



example setting on their contributions to society. Other fathers focused more on personal attributes. One father spoke about being straight forward and honest and leaving a good impression.

A sub-theme of guiding and teaching emerged from participant comments. Many fathers saw themselves as a link in a generational chain. They were passing to the future what their own father had instilled in them. As one father stated, "I'm sharing me forever with my kids" (Jordan, married father of three children ages 4 months, 2 years, and 5 years). Others described:

Fatherhood. Fatherhood means to me being a teacher, someone to share the ideals how to be a man, how to be a person, growing up, the whole honesty and integrity things that were kind of passed down from my dad and an obligation to show my son that. And how someday he'll be a person out in the world. That's what I'm trying to do the best I can. In a nut shell that's being a father. (John, married father of one child age 5)

I have in my hands two young lives, two young minds, people, souls, whatever you want to call them. Parenting, fathering, being a dad is shaping and preparing those entities to the best of my ability so they can go out into the world and make their way in it, survive it, deal with it, prosper and hopefully pass that on to their own kids. That's not always easy. Not always easy. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

*Responsibility.* Fathers' statements on responsibility (n=27) reoccurred as a primary theme of fatherhood. Comments on parent responsibility centered on being there and being part of the process.

Fatherhood means spending time with my little one in such a way that I understand the interests of her little mind and of her little heart and of her little process of learning. And being consistently part of that process. By which I mean, while because my job I can't be there for a period of the day, nevertheless I spend my mornings with her and I spend my evenings with her. (Allen, married father of one child age 2 years)

Fatherhood means mainly being there for your kids. You know, no matter what the needs are. No matter how minute or how significant they are. Everything in a child's life is important and if it's important to them, it's important to me. You know, no matter how big or how small and that's crucial right there. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

Several specifics of responsibility were delineated by fathers including financial responsibility (n=4), emotional support of children and spouse (n=5), and sharing home responsibilities such as cleaning and night time feedings (n=4). To some fathers this definition of responsibility was an expansion of the stereotypical role of fathers. As one father indicated, fatherhood means "to be a provider, not just monetarily, but also in emotional and spiritual ways" (Ari, married father of two children ages 10 months and 4 years). Others stated:

The next area that I found that really needs to be helped a lot is the emotional support in fatherhood. I found that it's not just the emotional support of giving it to the kids, but it's the emotional support of your spouse. I find that a lot of times. . .because you can sometimes get really frustrated and irritated with the kids and you want to take it out on them so bad and you know you can't and it's wrong. It's kind of nice to have, whether you have a spouse or a confidante, you need to have somebody there that you can vent in order to get it out rather than taking it out on your kids. That way you can keep yourself in a better emotional state with them in order to keep their emotions growing in a positive aspect rather than in a negative. My life was raised very much around a negative. I so much want to change that with my kids. I want to give my kids what I didn't have. And give them what they need physically. Give them what they need emotionally. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

It means taking on the responsibility of guiding and nurturing children. It means attempting to maintain the strength of the relationship with the person who is your co-parent. And, it means attempting to balance the time demands that being a father asks of you with your other responsibilities, whether they be work or personal. (Bill, divorced and re-partnered father of three children ages 10 months, 8 years, and 10 years)

*Sacrifice.* Many of the fathers (n=10) expressed intense feelings of love and pleasure for their children and their role as father. These new feelings combined with the new role in expressions of selflessness. Several fathers (n=7) discussed “widening my vision to think of my children, not just myself” (John, married father of one child age 5). In this vein, fathers saw fatherhood as a “sacrifice” and a practice of putting others first.

Its sacrifice of your alone life for one. Definitely one of the best things that ever happens to anyone, either fatherhood or motherhood. Putting somebody else’s needs in front of yours and feeling fine about that. Kind of a little bit against our selfish upbringing. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)

It’s being able to sacrifice yourself for a moment, for an afternoon, for a weekend. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

While the fathers were careful to delineate some specific attributes or responsibilities of fatherhood, participants often clarified their vision of themselves as father in relation to their children’s mother. The following results illustrated some of these comparisons and contrasts in order to more fully appreciate the uniqueness of the role of fatherhood.

### ***Differences and similarities of fatherhood and motherhood***

When asked if fatherhood differed from motherhood, and if so, how? fathers most often indicated they saw the roles as different or somewhat different (n=10). By contrast three of the fathers saw the roles as either the same or having

the same goals. The remaining fathers were less clear if they saw the roles as different or if all the differences evolved from the respective personalities of the parents involved rather than the inherent gender roles.

*Differences.* When discussing the differences between motherhood and fatherhood two distinct threads of conversation occurred. The first dealt with the daily roles and responsibilities of the mother and father. The second described more of the quality of the bond between the father and child and mother and child. Fathers were seen as assuming the role of provider, particularly financial provider. Mothers played a larger role in the home. This may have been especially true for this sample population as most of the mothers were primary care providers (n=14) and most of the fathers worked full-time outside the home (n=16). Several fathers expressed surprise at how much this division of labor created a division in the roles of parenthood. For example:

With my wife and I it's been, a lot of that has been career oriented. She left her job voluntarily. We choose not to warehouse him in a daycare and go with one income. So, she's with him all the time, whereas I went into a career and to be the main money winner. We choose that. We wanted at least one of us to be there all the time to see the things and not miss the things we both would. So, different in the sense that her time with him has been greater than mine. So, from a dad point of view I'm learning lot what she does being a mom and taking from that to join with her and not be going against the rules, but more a combination. So, I learn a lot from her and how to. So, I'm playing catch up if you will on day to day things. Yeah, the bond-wise is different. He has different bonding techniques with her than with me. Its complimentary, it's not totally different. I don't know if I quite answered that, but yeah, it is different, mom and dad. (John, married father of one child age 5)

Related, but different. I think that for me fatherhood is not defined by maleness per say, but by the relationship to primary caregiver versus

breadwinner of the family. Meaning that if my wife were to be working the 60 hour week rather than me working the 60 hour week I think our roles would be very much changed. For instance, I get to be the special treat for Anne. That's something she really values in a way that I don't think that she implicitly deeply values Kris, but that it is just much more, a deeper relationship because they get to spend more time together. They know each other better. For me that's the primary difference between the two. (Allen, married father of one child age 2 years)

Another defining characteristic discussed by many fathers as leading to the role division involved the quality of the bond between father and child and mother and child. As illustrated by the previous quote, some of the fathers felt that the time mothers and children spent together led to a certain kind of bond between them. Many fathers also credited the bond between mothers and children to the physical experiences of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.

She pumps breast milk and I'm challenged to provide that nutritional supplement to the baby. I am challenged to be as warm and close. There is an intimacy that can not be duplicated that the mother's breast provides. (Ari, married father of two children ages 10 months and 4 years)

For me it's always been...okay, mother and child are one being for nine months. They share the same body for that long. Anne, with both kids picked up on the differences in cries before I did. Picked up on the difference in body language before I did. Maybe, the emotional bond, and I'll restrain this to Anne and our kids, maybe the emotional bond there is more visceral. Not to say that it is any more or less deep seated than any emotional bond I have, but I think it is difference by design. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

I think, uh, well, historically in seems to be different. I think just...well, before that, physically it seems different. I mean, there's just different hormones that kick in to like, I mean I see it with Tina hormonally she's affected by things different, whereas I'm not. Where I might be a little bit more like, have more kind of attachment or something, I think that archetypically fathers tend to...if its not real, its at least real in the sense that its perceived and fathers see themselves as the protector and the provider and sometimes the disciplinarian, not that mothers don't do all of those things, but I think they do them in a different way. When I say,

oh...I think fathers, just by being a guy have a different, get a different response just by being male as opposed to being female. A kid sometime responds differently to that gender difference. (Tony, married father of one child age 10 months)

While this physical relationship between mothers and children leads to certain kinds of intimacy, fathers expressed how they experienced fatherhood as encouraging more independence and exploration in their children. These characteristics arose more strongly as the children grew older and weaned themselves from the physical connection to their mothers. Fathers saw mothers as more protective and encouraging of internal focus. In contrast, fathers pushed their children toward more external engagement in the world around them.

I really think there's significant differences and I didn't believe it, think it before having children. I thought, had kind of this androgynous view of people. That we are all socialized to be a certain way, but after having children, I know Pam became extremely nurturing and extremely protective and in early childhood, like infancy, I felt fairly removed from the process. And I think a lot of father do. Some things that I wasn't as comfortable with, that really first one year, one and a half years. I felt after two years I really started to kick in and I had more to offer the children, at some points more so than Pam. Again it was kind of taking misbehavior or acting out and being able to redirect it and encourage autonomy. I think Dads are equipped a little bit differently than moms to do that. And I think moms look at creativity and foster that, but I think it's a different kind of creativity. I don't think it's the exploration as much, kind of more introspection. Maybe fathers are more external, kind of leading kids to do more external things whereas mom kind of lead kids and children more towards internal introspective, understand yourself. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

Fatherhood seems to be more like let the kid fall. If the toddlers first walking, give them a little more room to test themselves and let them learn their own limits, where as moms are more overprotective (...). I kind of see it as my role in our family to make my kids aware of how rough or evil or callous the world can be so sometimes I'll point out stuff, while my wife's don't talk about road kill. Don't show them that. Sorry, but you

know...I don't want to raise a kid who doesn't know what road kill is. Or just, kids that make fun of them at school, or all the knocks and bruises that life gives you. I don't subject my kids to that, but I want to help them learn about it as best they can. Where as my wife, and I'm generalizing to motherhood in general, is more like, let's ignore that. Let's just stay safe and sound. Why would you want to go out and cause trouble? Stay home and do this... (Matt, married father of three children ages 4, 8, and 11)

Some fathers felt a difference in the roles of mothers and fathers, but were less clear on the source of the difference. They suggested that societal expectations or roles may be a factor in determining this difference. For example:

Also, it seems to me that mother have a much more emotional bond with their children. Fathers seem to have a much more intellectual bond with them. Now whether that is a natural thing or simply environmental coming from our society, I don't know. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

There is definitely a difference. Ideally, and this dovetails into my philosophy on parenting and mothering and whatnot, um, the mother is the child's first and primary contact, support, etc. The role of the father comes in later, though not significantly later, but after the role of the mother. I don't want to get into the whole culture/nature controversy here, but it seems to me that the father is. . . our society has relegated the father more to the role of the mind, the culture and the mother more to the role of the heart and nature. I don't know how valid that is, but I think that is where we've been pushed. I don't think the role of the father is necessarily that of disciplinarian or dictator or anything like that. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

*Similarities.* Though many of the fathers discussed the differences between motherhood and fatherhood, an underlying thread present in many responses was an acknowledgement of the similarities. These similarities were mentioned in terms of the shared experiences. These shared experiences sometimes came in the form of joint decisions and joint responsibility.

I see what we do as equal and the decisions we make as equal. In that sense I think that it compares to motherhood, because of the nurturance and the responsibility of parenting. (Jordan, married father of three children ages 4 months, 2 years, and 5 years)

At other times, the shared experience was more of a recognition of the range of responsibilities parents must fill and an acknowledgment that at certain times and in certain situations mothers or fathers can fulfill the full range of responsibilities. This view was expressed most clearly by men with divorced parents.

As well as everything that I've experienced being told growing up are the jobs, the job or the responsibility of a father, I think the responsibility mother's have crosses over to fathers as well. Not every mother can be locked into being the nurturing portion of the parent couple 24/7/365. A father has to be, I feel, just as much as a nurturing parent as the mother. In as much as he can be. I think most males my age and probably in my demographic were not brought up to be the nurturing sort of people, I guess, very nurturing. But, I think both parents roles can flip-flop as much as they need too. (Wayne, separated father of three children ages 4, 7, and 10)

In contrast, one father with divorced parents spoke of that experience as highlighting the difference in the roles his parents assumed in his own life. However, he was changing this pattern with his own children by actively trying to break down the difference in roles he and his wife choose. He described this experience:

Coming from a divorced family, I guess there's different ways of looking at it. There's probably two different answers. But from a divorced family you can say that the father's role was to provide monetarily and the mother's role was to provide emotionally. There's still some of that engrained into, I don't even know if its genetics, but possibly. With most of the men that I've talked to that seems like that their biggest concern is money. How do we provide for the family? And so I definitely have those concerns and I definitely am taking that responsibility on while my wife is



home with our daughter, but for me that role goes further than that. I want it to be, I want to be a confidant. I want to be someone that she can talk you at any age and I want to learn from her as much as she is learning from me. So, let me see, how does this differ from motherhood? You know, my wife and I are partners in this. Besides that fact that I can't breast feed her, I think we do everything else the same. We really are a team and I think that's what's going to make us strong with our children throughout their growing up. I guess what I am saying is that there have been differences in the past, but I think we are trying to break down those differences and not have those differences anymore. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

While the above comments illustrated the culturally proscribed or societal roles and responsibilities of parenting, others remarks indicated that some fathers felt that individual parents bring their personalities, experiences, strengths, and weaknesses to the role of parenthood. Some fathers saw these traits in turn shaping an individual as a mother or a father more than either gender or sex.

Well, as far as the nurturing aspect of it and the responsibility aspect of it, yeah. I think it's the same, but its different in that any adult relationship each person can contribute their own, hopefully their own positive traits, but also some of their negative ones, but everybody contributes their own strength to, I guess, the childrearing. Well, as far as the nurturing aspect of it and the responsibility aspect of it, yeah, I think it's the same, but its different in that any adult relationship each person can contribute their own, hopefully their own positive traits, but also some of their negative ones, but everybody contributes their own strength to, I guess, the childrearing. (Jason, married father of two children ages 3 and 6)

I don't know what is rooted in the roles of fatherhood and motherhood and what is rooted in Meg's and my different upbringings, the socialization, the genetics...there are definite roles. There are strengths and weaknesses. That is something that you need to recognize before you get married so they don't come as a surprise. There are things I'm not comfortable doing. Things that looking backwards were missing from my own childhood. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

Even with the similarities, differences remain. The following comment made by a father illustrates some of the complexities.

Stereotypical – mothers: caregivers, lovers, free laughs, kissing boo-boos, making sure there are clothes to wear, clean clothes, all the organizational efforts to get to soccer and summer camp and all the things. Maybe its because I have boys, but fathers play catch, fathers help them build fences and do manly kind of things. When I take them out for a fun day I probably take them to do different things than Meg would. I take them to play miniature golf or we go and try to learn how to fish or something like that. So, there's things that I do, things that she does. She works full time, so sometimes the roles are reversed. I'm the primary care giver and she's gone. She's responsible for both day and night shifts on the days that she works. She puts in some pretty long hours sometimes, so the boys and I are on our own then. The roles are different probably. I expect them to be a little more self-sufficient, less patient with them picking up after themselves and that kind of thing. I don't want to spend hours debating about stuff. "Mom is gone and Dad needs all the help he can get, so please help." "We'll get through this together and then we'll all be out in the driveway saying, "hi, mom, we're really glad your home!". The race to see who can get out there to greet her first. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

In this case the father actively filled all or most of the parenting role when his wife was working long hours. Though the activities may have been similar, the approach varied considerably. Additionally, both the father and the children seemed to view this as a less than ideal situation and the return of Mom was highly anticipated.

The above comments on the differences and similarities of fatherhood and motherhood describe a range of factors influencing how men view these roles. Some of the factors include societal forces, individual characteristics, the physical relationship between mothers and children, and the responsibilities of parenting. Regardless of how an individual father saw his own role or the generic role of fatherhood, he chose to enter the role. This decision to father was influenced by a variety of issues, as described in the following set of results.

### *Desire/Decision to father*

The fathers were split on whether or not they had always planned to be fathers. Some of the fathers indicated that they always knew they would be a father (n=6). Others had not considered being a father previous to making the decision to parent (n=9). Still others felt differently about being a father at various points in time. Many of the fathers stated that the desire and decision to parent came about after establishing the relationship with their partner or spouse. In these cases, parenting followed commitment to a romantic relationship with a woman.

The men who knew they had always wanted to be fathers traced these feelings back to childhood experiences of playing with younger children.

Yeah. Pretty much. I've always liked kids. I can remember being little and playing with my little cousins. I might have been 8 or 10 and they may have been 1 or 2, and so, I think I have always liked kids. I always knew I would have kids. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

Oh definitely, since I was little. I've worked with children throughout my entire life, so even when I was... I think starting at like age eight, I worked with little kids. I just knew I'd be a parent some day, that I'd be a really good parent. I think I am. I have my moments. (Tom, divorced father of two children ages 4 and 7)

One father associated his desire to have children with a strong sense of his personal identity. Being a father and his desire to be a father helped to shape how he saw himself in society.

Yeah, I did, actually. I think my paternal instincts were pretty strong comparatively to other guys. I think often times I would find myself in situations with the dudes where I was definitely thinking, oh, that would be really cool. That would be really neat to have a kid. And just an amazing amount of validity within your identity happens and that's something that I always gravitated to. I personally believe that in this particular society

we're really scattered and it's really difficult sometimes to have a solid identity and definitely being a parent suddenly gives you an identity. As my sister-in-law says, slapped with the grown up stick. Well, you really do get slapped with the grown up stick. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)

In contrast with this, one man in particular who had not seen himself as a father described how his lack of personal identification with fatherhood contrasted with the roles he saw other men assuming in society.

My sister did not have any children because they were modeling what was desirable and that just carried over into not having any desire to have children. I had no desire to have children. Growing up in this quintessential American family, my values were not rooted into... my goal was not to make my own little nest with this wonderful wife and two wonderful children and church on Sunday. Nor was that a goal. It was not a dream. Although obviously you were supposed to go to school, meet somebody and get married. Given my upbringing I did not want to rush into anything. Some friends got married out of high school. Those were all divorced pretty quickly. There were some that got married out of college, a high percentage of those got divorced. So, I went through this whole cycle with all my friends. I realized that if I was going to get married I'd better be pretty selective about it. I partied a lot, dated a lot, had lots of fun, did lots of things. Had a couple of nine year relationships, but not one that would have me even consider this family part, children, buying a home, those kinds of things. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

Other men described feeling differently about the prospect of fatherhood at various times.

I've definitely gone through stages. So its, there's been times that I've been for kids and times when I didn't want to have any kids. Its really, I'd never really determined anything for sure. Sort of an open kind of a question that I had opinions on, but they changed a lot, so... (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

Though a substantial number of the participants either had not thought about fatherhood or had vacillated on their desire to parent, each eventually went

through a process of deciding to become fathers. Many of the men who had not seen themselves as future fathers while they were growing up were able to describe some of the process and circumstance of their move toward fatherhood. Maturity seemed to be one factor in the decision to parent. Some participants expressed a sense that they had moved past their years of exploring themselves and the world and they were ready to make new commitments to wives and children.

I want to be a father. I want to feed babies, to nurture, to shape. So, I don't know if I would have been prepared to do and say that at 22, to have kids at 22, though I was engaged at 22. What I'm saying is that I'm glad I didn't get married. I didn't have kids, because what happened after 22 is that I traveled the world. I met people. I learned about relationships. I became less egotistical, less macho, more feminine, more open to everyone including sexual minorities. So, I'm glad that I wasn't that upstart, egotistical, bigotist young man that I was in my youth, because I prefer the man that I am to the man that I was. Therefore, what I'm saying is that as a father I think I'm able to make choices and to listen and to be open to my kids, where ever they are coming from. (Jordan, married father of three children ages 4 months, 2 years, and 5 years)

No. In my twenties I was chasing careers and single and traveling and, you know, it wasn't a "I never want to be a dad," but it was "I'm not ready" and I just wasn't interested and I would have been a poor one if not... You know I've never been 22 and been a dad, but who knows. No, I hadn't really thought of it for a long time. And then I ended up getting older and in my thirties and then meeting Kim and we've been married almost six years now and she never thought it either and we...yeah, it just worked out. So, a metamorphosis...there was a time I would have never thought of it, to know its just like I wouldn't think anything but, it's the greatest thing. It's great. (John, married father of one child age 5)

For some the commitment to a partner or a marriage preceded the desire for children. It almost seemed that the relationship opened up the possibility for other commitments, other relationships.

What a better way to complete a family. Being married is one thing, but I've seen a lot of people who were married and never had kids and I never

see them as a family. I see them as a couple. Personally, I've always viewed that if you want a family, you've got to have at least a child because three strands of string make a stronger wire than two. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

But, I thought overall they were worthwhile, so the thought whether or not I wanted to be a father got more concrete then. The ramifications and the consequences became a little more tangible, so, you know. And then, like I said, it's amazing, it just seemed like time. Suddenly, married as well. I'd always kind of thought about, would I get married, I guess so. And then suddenly, in my late 20s, okay, it seemed like the thing to do. (Matt, married father of three children ages 4, 8, and 11)

One father's trust in his wife's abilities allowed him to take the risk of parenthood. He believed so deeply in her capacity as a mother that his own insecurities around parenting ceased to be a reason to not parent.

It was not going to be a disaster like I grew up in. I think she is capable of taking care of the whole load if necessary, so that comfort, that security, that opened my eyes for the first time to that possibility. My aunts and uncles had long ago given up on me for getting married, much less having children to carry on the family name, so we surprised them not once, but twice. So, that's how the children came about. The environment was very ... I just had a very clear feeling that the marriage would work and once that feeling happened, then, well, I felt confident that however scary having children would be it wouldn't be a fear of my own failing, the failings of the father, because Meg would make up for those short comings. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

Another father mentioned that, while not a crucial part of the decision to parent, the desire to carry on the male line of the family contributed to his decision to have a child.

I started getting that fatherhood feeling. Not that it was a huge factor, but I am the last. Mason now is the last male in our family line which is a big deal to my dad. Yeah, but as you get older you start to kind of think about that too. It was never a big deal in my 20s, but in my 30s, you know, now that Mason's born, I'm happy about continuing the family line. (George, married father of one child age 10 months)

Visions of fatherhood were constructed through fathers' own experiences and the roles and activities they witnessed other fathers engaging in around them. An important source of both contrast and support were their co-parents, the children's mothers. The decisions to father were arrived at differently by different fathers, however most expressed a gain in maturity and a sense of security in the relationship with the child's mother as contributing factors.

**-- Section Two --**  
**What are men's expectations regarding fatherhood?**

The participants' expectations of fatherhood varied. Most expectations were fairly abstract and focused more on feelings than on specific ideas of what fatherhood would be like. A few specifics were delineated regarding changes in lifestyle of visions of spending time with children.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Research Question –</b><br><i><b>What are men's expectations regarding fatherhood?</b></i> |
|---|

|         |
|---------|
| Themes: |
|---------|

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ excitement and love</li> <li>❖ shared activities</li> <li>❖ role models</li> <li>❖ fears</li> <li>❖ no expectations</li> </ul> |
|---|

***Excitement and love***

When asked what they expected being a father would be like, half the fathers (n=11) described how they saw fatherhood before becoming a father as revolving around feelings of excitement and love.

I guess I really thought that, I knew I was going to be in love with whoever it was before I even saw them. I was always completely in love with the fact of being a father. And I really was excited about being very close to a child. Probably my biggest fear beyond the pregnancy and hoping that I had a healthy child was that my child wouldn't love me as much as I loved it. I was really excited about this deep connection. (Jason, married father of two children ages 3 and 6)



### ***Shared activities***

Other fathers spoke of being the child's buddy. In these sets of expectations the fathers looked into the future, past the baby stage.

I probably looked in the beginning...first child, never having children before...as being a buddy and someone to go fishing with and doing all these superficial types things. You know, really cool things like that. (John, married father of one child age 5)

One father in particular explained how he had always pictured his child as being 5 or 6 prior to the birth. In fact, this vision was so strong that after his son was born the father experienced a monetary confusion regarding who this tiny person was and where his own son must have gone.

### ***Role models***

Nearly half of the fathers' (n=8) expectations of their roles as fathers were formed by role models around them. Most frequently these roles models were their own fathers or other family members, such as siblings, who were parents before them. These role models formed the basis of understanding fatherhood. However, the fathers expressed a wide range of reactions to these role models. While some fathers desired to emulate their own fathers, many hoped to be different. Some could remember their own childhood and the discomfort they felt in response to certain parenting styles of their fathers. Others feared that they would be just like their father. Still others felt that though their fathers were

decent or even good parents, the experiences of parenting twenty to thirty years ago were no longer applicable since so much of society had changed.

Specifically, I like to think I was a good kid. I think my father had a very easy time parenting me, granted I was the third of three kids, so he might have had it down by then. But my expectations are based on what I saw him do. And that's not applicable at all. I mean, I've got two different kids. It's thirty, almost 40 years later. The world's a different place. I don't know if I answered your question, I'm sorry. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

Sometimes various expectations combined into new and unforeseen experiences.

I did have expectations born of what I didn't want to be like and I knew that I would love being a dad and I absolutely do love it. I love it more than I could have anticipated. It's also been immensely fulfilling for me because I think it's given me some of the things that I lacked when I was growing up. Even though I'm in a different role, it's still in the relationship that I have with my kids I'm finding that some of the things that I didn't have are coming present. (Bill, divorced and re-partnered father of three children ages 10 months, 8 years, and 10 years)

More discussion of role models and their impact on fathers expectations one presented in Section Four.

### ***Fears***

A few fathers (n=5) expressed fears about the role of fatherhood. These fears seemed to stem from concerns about the change in lifestyle resulting from parenthood, specifically less freedom and more responsibility.

And to meet the challenge, fatherhood is a big scary thing, especially for myself as a man, I think of it as my manhood because there is a threat of

being taken away from the self rather than being a transformation of the self. (Allen, married father of one child age 2 years)

I guess in my head before hand I tried to concentrate on the negative aspects. Not necessarily the negatives, but what if something goes wrong and there will be 5,000 diapers to change over his life time and it was really exciting that she was pregnant and I was really excited about that and that seemed sort of at the time disassociated from what was going to happen. So, there was this kind of cool my wife's pregnant and her belly's growing and its starting to kick and its just really cute. And then when the baby gets here there will be all these things that I need to do. And that's sort of what I thought about the beginning, you know when she's pregnant. Once he is actually here, the things that I thought were going to be tedious or take a lot of time, I don't really care about. I mean changing diapers is not a big deal. The change in lifestyle or life schedule is...doesn't really bother me. It's just so cool that...Zeke, sitting around the house watching him play with stuff is just much more entertaining that I would have ever thought it would have been before hand. So, yeah, I guess my expectations prior to him were sort of focused on how this was going to impact our current lifestyle that we've set up for ourselves and what we do and how most of these changes seem to be, you know, not changes for the better. It seemed to be a lot of what the pre-baby thoughts were. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

The lifestyle change was difficult, but I knew it was going to be difficult. Because even after we got married, we lived in our college town, you know, so we still went to all our college haunts and went out with college friends, and we were still into that life style and I know that was going to be a tough change. It was a harder change for me than for her, you know, because she's a mom, and so I could sneak away on Wednesday nights to go out and do something and she couldn't, so it took longer for me to like totally get out of that lifestyle and I knew that was going to be a big life changing thing. But, mostly it was more the fun stuff that I was worried about. Not being able to go out and party and stuff. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

One father feared the change to parenthood and the potential impacts this change could have on his artistic life. He found that indeed his artistic life was forced to take a backseat to his responsibilities as a parent. He continued to have

many fears about how he would respond to this challenging situation. As he explained:

That it would deplete my art. That is would deplete my repor with the world and in large part it has. That I given the way I shape my life to have a child, which is to get this job, and then my, I used to spend a lot of time by myself and that time is no longer available to me. And in many ways I thought that that would drive me over the edge and would force me to betray the people that I wanted to be committed to and hence my terror. And I have found that while I was accurate in my diagnosis of it killing my spiritual rapport in many ways, it has not necessarily driven me to betrayal. (Allen, married father of one child age 2 years)

### *No expectations*

An additional group of fathers indicated that they had no idea what they were getting into before hand. As one father stated, "I had no idea what I was getting into, totally" (Matt, married father of three children ages 4, 8, and 11). Not only did they have few expectations, but the reality of parenthood ended up being more powerful and overwhelming than they could have imagined.

Because all of the men had already become fathers, these reflections were seen through the lens of time. They were able to express not only their expectations, but how these expectations had been met or changed after becoming fathers. The results presented in response to the second research question illustrate this.

-- Section Three --  
**How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers?**

Fathers described how after the birth of their children they found their prior expectations had been unrealistic. The experience of fatherhood required more effort than expected and fathers responded by examining and changing their involvement in their children's

**Research Question –**

***How have these expectations changed after becoming fathers?***

Themes:

- ❖ parenting is hard
- ❖ change in involvement in children's lives
  - scheduling
  - mother's schedule
  - work arrangements
  - time to play
  - child's development
  - impact of divorce
- ❖ impact of other parents
- ❖ increased financial responsibility
- ❖ fatherhood impacts everything
  - moving to be closer to grandparents
  - moving to be closer to children
  - personal time and habits

lives, increasing their financial stability, and acknowledging that parenthood impacted all aspects of their lives.

What I'm finding is that's all great, and I'm enjoying showing him how to play catch and all and writing and whatever, and yeah, the whole being a buddy, but being a parent, rules and dos and don'ts and real nuts and bolts of being a dad. Yeah, it's changed from the "boy this is going to be fun all the time..." Whether that it's that I've got to do some work and learn about how to be one. I've had to read things on how to be a dad and things where I'm going to improve myself so that I'm not so clueless all the time. And again, from my wife to, I get a lot from her. So yeah, it has changed from him being born to a look at what a cool entity to him being a person, growing and watching him change and my role. So, yeah it has, the expectations of what I thought to what it is, yeah it's really different. (John, married father of one child age 5)

### ***Parenting is hard!***

As discussed previously, when fathers were asked about their expectations of fatherhood they spoke of role models and feelings of love and excitement. An unexpected experience that many fathers (n=9) remarked upon was how challenging parenthood turned out to be. Father described this experience in different ways. Some especially fathers of infants, found the physical challenge of lack of sleep and increased stress harder than expected. Others spoke of how it requires more multitasking and constant attention than expected.

I really did not expect to be so challenged physically and emotionally. I guess mostly emotionally by everything that was going on, but the sacrifice, I guess, is the biggest part. You're really sacrificing your own self a lot of the time. No, I have to wake up. I don't need to worry about how I'm going to feel later on. I guess I didn't expect...I got used to it. I'm still getting used to it. It's still changing. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)

As Jade grew and I became more of a parent, of a father and then with the birth of Orion, it's a hell of a lot harder than I thought it would be. And it is a very, it has been a very trying experience for me. I've learned a lot about myself – what I can take, what I can't, what I can handle, what I can't. This has not always been an enjoyable experience to be certain. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

It's so hard. If I ever got a full grasp on it, I would say that I've failed. I think that you have to be willing to change with time. You have to be easy. You can't be rigid. You have to be loose and flexible. If you ever get a full grasp on it then its over, you might as well give up. I love the excitement. I love not knowing. So, no, I have absolutely no idea what it is to be a father. I love it. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

This stress was balanced by the unexpected rewards.

But at the same time, it's funny because I love my kids so much but I get very frustrated when they don't listen to me. But then when I get frustrated

they'll do something absolutely amazing and that's when I sit back and I go, "Wow, this is what being a parent is all about." I mean they just, the rewards when they come are just huge and it's funny because especially for me, my kids have helped me appreciate a lot of the more littler things in my life. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

### *Change in involvement in children's lives*

*Table 7 -*

| <b>Who cares for your child during the day?*</b>                                    |    |
|---|----|
| Mother primary care giver   | 14 |
| Father primary care giver   | 1  |
| Parents share care giving   | 3  |
| Mother primary care giver, father has certain times during the week of primary care | 5  |
| All children in daycare and/or school   | 3  |

\*figures include families with current and ex-wives (n=21)

scheduling changes to allow for more time to spend with their child or children.

The scheduling changes evolved in different ways and for reasons reflective of that particular father's life situation. One father spoke of his conscious decision to actively engage in his son's life even though there was plenty of available care for the child. Other men balanced their wife's schedules, their own work schedule, and other demands with finding time to engage with their children.

When asked how

their involvement in their children's lives had

changed over time, fathers

most often (n=14) cited

*Scheduling changes.* Other fathers' decisions to change their time schedule to have more active involvement with their child came after a change in

*Table 8 – Work Schedules*

| <b>Parents work (and/or school) schedules*</b> |        |    |
|--|--------|----|
| Works full-time                                | Father | 16 |
|  | Mother | 6  |
| Works part-time                                | Father | 1  |
|  | Mother | 4  |
| Full-time student                              | Father | 3  |
|  | Mother | -  |
| Part-time student                              | Father | -  |
|  | Mother | 1  |
| Does not work outside the home                 | Father | -  |
|  | Mother | 10 |

\*figures include fathers, current wives, and ex-wives who are mothers (n=41)

new ways to shift his schedule upon completion of school in order to participate more actively in his child's life.

So, that's changed being out of school so I can do more. I'm attempting to do more, participate more. A lot of things where it was just my wife and Ian would go do and I'd have to sit inside, where as now I'm going. I'm going, yeah, I want to go to the park, I want to do this. So, being more, being done with that, you know I had to do that for all of us, but I want to be there for him. Being a dad. As he's getting older, I see the bond going from tighter to Kim to ...I guess boys as they get older they get tighter to the dad, so I feel him getting closer, coming closer to me. Always wanting to know where I'm at...that wasn't true a couple of years ago. I think that's neat... (John, married father of one child age 5)

Another father described how his experience of a stretch of unemployment allowed him to re-examine his priorities. He described this experience as follows:

During that period of time I did a lot of soul searching...a lot of it was from a new space...certainly a very clear picture of what was important to you in your lives...(unintelligible)...becomes very clear when you don't have a job. Family first. Yeah, it's changed as they've grown. My situation changed. I missed a lot of their life when I was working a lot of

circumstances related to work or school. One father described his sense that during the years he was in graduate school he had missed out on many parenting experiences. He looked forward to finding



hours. 50+ hours a week and no days off on weekends sometimes. I missed parties and soccer games and such. But they only grow up once and I didn't want to miss that (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

*Mother's schedule.* Sometimes the changes were a response to changes in the mother's schedule. A few of the mothers (n=4) worked part-time and their partners helped cover childcare when they were working. Fathers described the flexibility with which schedules changed over time and the couple shifted arrangements to over the changing needs. While challenging, fathers expressed appreciation of the time they had with their children.

Also, during the day, my wife's not working right now, though when she was, she was working after the fourth month, and I would spend three days a week with her from 8 to 1, so that is going to occur again starting next week. So, I think the more time we spend together I think the more our time together is affected. (Dave, married father of one child age 9 months)

*Work arrangements.* Other fathers modified their work arrangements to accommodate their children's needs from the beginning. One father expressed his experience and how it evolved from his identity being a father and then a "worker."

Yes. More so, like my work schedule is organized around my wife's work schedule and that enables me to spend a lot of time, sometimes more time than she is, a week in seeing the kids and taking care of them. Taking them to school. Feeding them. I have to rush home after work on some days. I have to wait on sitters and things like that. I have to call and make sure they are fed during my lunch hour, during breaks, things like that. So, there is an active role, ongoing role. I think I am more a father who is working, than a worker who is a father. (Jordan, married father of three children ages 4 months, 2 years, and 5 years)

*Time to play.* Though being the primary breadwinner limited some fathers' abilities to modify their work schedules, they did make efforts to be responsive to their children's needs by setting aside particular times of the day for attention and play. Several fathers related morning routines which allowed them to have special time with their child while the mother slept and before the father headed off to work. Other fathers spoke of the efforts they made at the end of the day to be available to their children to talk over their days and help with the bedtime routine.

As illustrated earlier, many fathers felt the strength of the mother-child bond when the children were infants. Sometimes this meant fathers were less involved in care giving during the first few months.

*Child's development.* Fathers (n=9) also discussed how the development and aging of their children has allowed for a different kind of involvement in their children's lives.

Umm...well, the first six months I would say I was less involved than I was after that. So, I guess in the first six months Mom was more involved than I was. And that was especially true with the second one, because when the second one came I usually would take responsibility for the older one and the second one was left with mom, especially in the first six months to a year. That's probably the only way in which that's changed. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

As the child grew older, the types of interactions and breadth of communication expanded with the child's increasing independence and knowledge. Fathers explained the complexity of these changes as reflective of the changing needs of their child. For example:

Wow. I know my role has expanded, has increased both in amount of degrees and matter of kind or design. By way of example, Jade and I used to take walks. And you know she was along for the ride. It was Jade, she rocked back and forth and bam she was asleep. Now when we go for a walk, my role has changed from that of vehicular transport to educator and I think that is just an example of how I'm becoming, ooh, buzz word, a resource for her. And with Orion, the same thing though on a much lesser level, I mean he's half Jade's age. So, becoming a resource is one. And that's pretty broad because it's teaching her not only how to distinguish between a male duck and a female duck, but how to calm herself down when she's in a high emotional state. We haven't gotten to the monsters under the bed thing, but I'm pretty sure we will at some point and I'll help her deal with that. I've also noticed that roles I've filled previously – security blanket – have diminished over time. You know, she still needs me to sit with her and watch a certain part of a movie, but I'm not sitting there with her through a whole movie. So, her dependence on me is decreasing in certain aspects, at the same time I'm becoming more of a resource for her on other aspects. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

This change in experience was remarked upon both by fathers who lived with their children as well as dads who shared physical custody with the mother.

You know, I let them be more independent. I'm less intrusive. I guide them when we do new stuff. So, I might say, we're going to do this and this is why and kind of give them a reason that we're going to do it. But I actually step back and let them be more independent. I'm less controlling. (Tom, divorced father of two children ages 4 and 7 – this dad is also a divorced father, but remarks reflect ongoing relationship, not change in status of parenting)

As children aged, fathers expressed more interest in their children through enjoyment of engaging activities as friends and decreased dependence on their parents.

Umm, I notice that there's a lot less dependence on me, you know, as Mason gets older. We're moving into a cool period of doing things as friends. (George, married father of one child age 10 months)

Well, it's a little new, but I do see that he's just more boyish and he's less...I definitely notice the difference from when he was an infant to now he's just more boyish, so that's funner. I can play with him more, actually play with him more, so that's really nice. (Tony, married father of one child age 10 months)

*Impact of divorce.* Three of the fathers interviewed are divorced or separated and co-parenting their children with their ex-wives. The circumstances of these three fathers are very different and have led to very different responses by these fathers. Two of the fathers have a fairly high level of involvement with their children. The third father has little consistent contact with his kids. Also, his schedule is controlled by military commitments.

*Impact of other parents.* While most of the fathers who made changes in their involvement with children cited work schedule changes as an impetus or their level of involvement was self-driven, one father described how talking with other parents about parenting arrangements encouraged him to take a more active role, especially at night. As he stated:

Uh, yeah, it's changing. It's getting more and more...like I said earlier I do rely a lot on mom when she needs something. You know, I know of some fathers...we did this Birth-to-Three class and, you know, I was able to hear

about how all the other dads and moms handled the middle of the night scenarios. I have in the past, you know, we've arranged where I would keep sleeping because I had to go to work and Amy, my wife would get up and feed her and get her back to sleep. And that's starting to change where I'm getting more involved in that. (Dave, married father of one child age 9 months)

### *Increased financial responsibility*

The most common response (n=12) to the question of how being a parent has impacted other decisions was in the area of increased financial responsibility and professional stability. The fathers expressed keen concerns about financially and responsibly providing for their children and families. For example:

I've always been under the opinion, starting with cats or pets in general, when you chose to adopt a pet, that's your responsibility. They are totally dependent on you for their health and welfare. This is a sense of responsibility that is not to be taken lightly and multiply that a hundred fold if you are talking about children. I would never have had children had I not had a sense that they would have a stable home...I could financially provide for them, see to their every needs to ensure that they had a better life or the potential for a better life than we had, including the dedication between us. Don't take on any more than you can handle, but make sure you pay homage to the things that you chose. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

Oh, sure. Yeah, I'm a total basket case when it comes to being, you know, the provider issue. It totally like affected me. (Laughter) Yeah, so that whole kind of mythic kind of thing definitely sprouted up big, and, you know, I mean values...it hasn't really changed my values, it's refocused them I would say. I mean it's taught me, it's given me the ability to really gain a lot of pleasure out of being more selfless and give up whatever. (Tony, married father of one child age 10 months)

One father faced unemployment and the need to find a new job. His description of this experience illustrates how enmeshed parental responsibility and financial responsibility are in life decisions in general.

Oh, before I was working at HP, the company that I worked at for 20 years, I was terminated because of a verbal exchange with an employee. It came as a complete surprise. I never thought that would happen. I was fired from there. After the anger and withdraw you go through...so at the age of 53 I was going to start over. I thought we were going to have to move. Meg was a stay at home mom at the time home schooling Christian and it was huge. It would have been bad enough had I been single. Now I had a wife and two kids and a house and a dog and a cat and a turtle and two rats. And I had no benefits. I'm living on unemployment. The economy sucks. There's no job. Horrible. It was one of the most horrible events of my life partly as a result of having all that responsibility. You're old. You have to find a job. What kind of a job are you going to find? How much are you going to have to start over? Are you going to have to get an entry level job again and work my way up or am I going to be able to fall back on some of my skills and education? Where are we going to live? I interviewed in Philadelphia, Washington, Idaho. So, having them there, that was a blessing and a curse. I wanted to do job searching stuff and "come on Daddy let's go..." They didn't understand why I had to do those things. But when the day was done I'd go and spend some time with them. Sit on the couch and read books. They simply had no idea what was going on in our life. They're worried about what we are going to have for dinner and I'm worried about the rest of our lives. Though it was kind of refreshing that they didn't know. They weren't worried that I didn't have a job...very child like. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

### ***Fatherhood impacts everything***

Just as the father above, many of the men (n=7) also indicated that their role as a father has impacted everything else in their lives. Examples of this included moving or buying houses, living near grandparents, balancing time and money, and making lifestyle changes.

It's like the core of my being. It's my first identity really, is being a father and being in the family and everything. So, just based on that I think it pretty much affects everything. All the decisions are pretty much made based on the well being of the whole family. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

*Moving to be closer to grandparents.* For one family this meant a move to be closer to grandparents.

Well, it definitely has. It's changed our lives drastically. Specifically, okay, we lived in Eugene for eight years, both of us, at different times. This last year we really realized in the first year of Jasper's life that it would be positive to be around her grandparents because they were coming down pretty frequently from Newburg, which is a little bit south of Portland. As a result, they actually looked into buying a house up in the Portland area because they wanted to make an investment in themselves. They have a four acre place in Newburg and they decided they're going to get to a place where they don't want to take care of that place as much because of their own health and they wanted to get something smaller in the Portland area. And they said, why don't you stay in it while we're still working on this place? We said, great, wonderful, I can't believe it, that's awesome. So we totally made the decision to move to Portland based on the fact that we, number one, were going to be close to grandparents and, number two, we were going to be living in a house with no rent which is going to be really positive for saving money or just getting...being able to pay for all the different expenses that happens as a result of having kids. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)

*Moving to be closer to children.* For another, this meant moving across states to follow his ex-wife and children in order to maintain contact with and involvement in this lives.

Oh, a ton. I think I'm a pretty selfish person because I know what I like. I know what I want to accomplish, but what I've wanted to accomplish by my life has been altered completely by having children. So, I live in places that I would never choose to live in. Because there is no way that I would live in Salt Lake. There is no way in hell. but I kind of have compromised. Well, I'll live here and I'll do these other things that make me happy. But, if they moved again I would probably move again. I feel

so strongly that they need, I think they need both parents and they need them for very different reasons. I feel so strongly. And I think mothers and fathers have different things to bring to the table. I think its possible and be a single parent and not have the other parent involved if that's what you have to do, but I don't think it's the best thing. And, there's certainly situations when, you know, the other parent shouldn't be involved, but I think for the most part both parents should. (Tom, divorced father of two children ages 4 and 7)

*Personal time and habits.* Even personal time and habits were adjusted to include children.

So, what I do changes. So, even in my spare time, the thing that I love the most, that I find solitude in, gardening, I have to incorporate that. I realize that this is not my space only. This is their space as well. Even the house. The furniture. The way we lay out the living, the kid's room. We have to have, even though they have their kids room, I have to incorporate their area and clean up after them kind of thing. (Jordan, married father of three children ages 4 months, 2 years, and 5 years)

Many fathers found parenting much harder than expected. Another impact of fatherhood was the changes fathers instigated in their schedules to accommodate their children. Scheduling changes were challenging and required balance with the increased financial responsibility felt by fathers. These and other experiences led many fathers to simply indicate that fatherhood impacts everything. The next section examines what factors, role models in particular, shaped and influenced fathers' expectations of fatherhood both before and after becoming fathers.



**-- Section Four --**  
**What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations?**

The fathers interviewed for this study all were struggling with their need to define fatherhood for themselves. Many reached out for guidance from a variety of sources including role models in their families and communities.

**Research Question –**

***What factors or role models shape and influence these expectations?***

Themes:

- ❖ role model for parenting
  - parents
  - other family members
  - other families
  - boss/co-workers
  - friends
  - television characters
- ❖ role models for manhood
- ❖ how role models have shaped parenting
- ❖ examples of what not to be
- ❖ influence of wife/partner

***Role models for fatherhood***

*Fathers, mothers, step-parents, and in-laws as role models.* When asked about who their parenting role models are or were, most fathers (n=16) first turned to their parents, including fathers, mothers, step-parents and in-laws. Because their development and childhood were shaped by their parents, fathers found they naturally emulated their parents' -- especially their father's-- behaviors. When specifically citing a role model, fathers usually spoke of their own fathers first. However, when describing the experience of being guided or influenced by a role model, mothers were mentioned as frequently as fathers. Some role models served as an example or a remembered pattern of parenting, while others functioned as current sources of support or information. For example:

Yeah, I look at him as a role model or a bench mark, but I kind of feel like the stuff that I don't have to work at is the stuff that he...I can do most of the stuff he could do without working at it. I'm more conscious of the stuff I feel like he didn't do such a good job at. So, I guess I feel like I could be the father that he was without working at it. That it would come naturally. I think that's the kind of father he was. He did just what he knew. I think that in that era, I don't think there was a lot of fathering. There probably wasn't a lot of discussions going on about fathering, I don't think, so I think those guys just winged it and did what their dads did or whatever. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

I think all four of my parents come into play. And Kris's parents as well. Kris's parents maybe being the best current model of what parenting is like. My own parents in their acts of becoming adults. In their continued presence in our lives. And mother in particular being the model of, I can't even begin to diagnosis a process of how she served as a model, even though I know that she is too. Because my own mode of parenting and hers are somewhat different. I feel like the connection, yet I can't quite say how it is. She was the person who was there all the way with us, through it all. She laid down the lines. (Allen, married father of one child age 2 years)

In general, the love and admiration felt by many men for their parents was freely expressed. As one father explained:

That would be my mom and dad. Both working parents and they just, but they worked and yet they gave and continue to give as grandparents. I mean they're just great role models. They taught me all the right and wrong and honesty and integrity and things in life. You know, real helpful. Especially being a young man and going through puberty and real tough things. (John, married father of one child age 5)

One father described how he came to appreciate his parents and their sacrifices only after becoming a parent himself. Though his father had many misgivings about his parents' abilities and lack of successes as parents, he still recognized their shared experience as parents.

After having our first child it became quickly apparent how much your life changes, how much your life revolves around your child. They're totally dependent on you. And then I realized all the sacrifices my parents made

for me – the sleepless nights and the colic and the diaper changes and so I became instantly more grateful for what they had done. I had lacked the realization of that earlier. And that was redoubled after our second child was born. It's just a lot more commitment. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

In this particular case the appreciation of his father was particularly poignant since he recognized in himself his own father's struggle with how to end the pattern of bad parenting. This father thought that good role models were the best preparation for parenting. And he asked, where do you turn if your own parents were poor role models?

My dad once told me when he was going through a rehab program at the veteran's hospital...this was after he had divorced my mother and remarried...but there was a confrontational period that my sister and I had to go through in Roseburg and we had to tell my dad how alcohol had effected our lives and blah, blah, blah, all the negatives. That was supposed to have some beneficial impact on him, but, you know...his answer was "no one ever taught me to be a father." He had no role model to be a father. He didn't know what to do. I don't think you're pre-programmed with traits that are conducive to being a father. I'm sure there are some people who have very poor fathers and fathering role models, but use that to their own advantage somehow to be better parents. So, but I don't think there is any better option than to have lived your whole life, to have grown up in the comfortable environment with two parents who love each other, who provide a loving home for their children and open their home to their children's friends and those kinds of things. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

About half of the fathers were raised by single mothers either for the majority of their childhoods or for substantial period of time. These men described how they reached out for a father figure, sometimes turning to their own fathers who did not live with them, other times finding role models in the community.

My dad on the other hand was, I mean, he was a role model, but he was just out there. We would go backpacking. I started backpacking when I was eight. One time we went backpacking during a rainstorm and we had umbrellas strapped to our backpacks and we got hit by a flash flood and we went anyway. That's my dad. He was really into the, you're going to do it because it's good for you kind of think. But, um, he was more philosophical and he would talk about Indian philosophy and Buddhist philosophy and even though he wasn't as involved in my life, that stuff has stuck with me a lot more than the stuff my mom did. I lived with my mom and I don't think I would have been open and ready to hear the stuff that my dad was talking about if my mom hadn't worked hard to make my environment feel safe. (Tom, divorced father of two children ages 4 and 7)

My mother was strong...she was both mother and father, but I had community role models. I had male friends who were older than me. The reason I befriended older men in my community is because I probably was looking for a father figure. I did have a step-dad for a short time and he probably provided...I can, it's almost, as I think back now that I am 36, I kind of introspect occasionally and I can see traits and I can see ambitions which are reflective of all these guys that I knew. (Jordan, married father of three children ages 4 months, 2 years, and 5 years – mother present, missed father)

*Other family members.* Some fathers drew on many family members as role models. Some of these role models were older family members, such as sisters, brothers and grandparents, who had been involved in parenting the men when they were children. In other instances, such as the example below, these role models were currently parenting their own children and so offered contemporary parenting models.

I guess for my personal standpoint it would be, yeah, the only real role models I have would be Nicola's brother and his wife who is also named Nicola, so who people call Nicola M and Darrin are probably the best role models I have. They have three little girls and while their parenting styles aren't the same, they're fairly close especially in the type of relationship, us both having a kind of...I don't know what you would call it, but especially Darrin's role I guess. I can't speak as much for Nicola Ms role, but Darrin's role as a father. Sort of a loving, caring, hands on figure

rather than sort of the male role model I had when I was growing up. If that makes sense. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

*Other families as role models.* The families and the communities around fathers both served as role models as well. Some fathers found themselves responding to the health and goodness they saw in intact, functioning family units.

So, it wasn't so much that a particular father fashioned the way that I thought about being a dad, it was more that I could see that in a healthy and intact family there was a great goodness and that I think that that was something that did play out for me now. (Bill, divorced and re-partnered father of three children ages 10 months, 8 years, and 10 years)

Another father drew on the support of knowing that all the people surrounding himself, his child, and his family served in some way to support him as a father and provide role models for himself and his children.

I guess I've always been a believer that it takes a village to raise a child. Even though we live in a more divided, more smaller family units these days. I still think we draw on the people around. So, I grew up in a small neighborhood. I knew other kids. I knew their parents. So, I definitely saw how they were parented. I saw how other families lived. We were close enough with extended family that I could see how my parents were raised, in glimpses. I could see how my cousins were raised. And so, you take in influences from the other people around you, not just from your parents. I do believe that everybody around me helped raise me in one way or another. The same as I plan on doing with my daughter, that everybody around adds a little bit to their creation. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

*Boss/co-worker.* Men who grew up without strong role models in their parents sometimes turned to a boss or co-worker as a role model.

My parenting role models. . . I had a really, my childhood wasn't good, so my parental units were defective. The ones that I tend to look up to, especially one that I look up to now is my boss, Jim. I've known him since

I was a little kid and he's a very, very smart man and I've always kind of looked up to him in the fact of how smart. He tends to be really logical about things and tends to have a pretty level head on most things. Nobody's perfect. That's what I learned by watching him. But I would say that he has been one person in my life that had a very huge impact on my life. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

*Friends with kids, other parents.* The impact of friends who are parenting at the same time as these fathers came up several times as a powerful influence or role model.

We were really lucky. A set of our friends have a son who is now five, oh gosh, he's six. So, before Emma was born we hung around them a lot and got to see them in action and kind of see them with discipline and just having fun with their kid and getting to be there too and be part of that. That was a great experience. That was really important to have that. (Ari, married father of two children ages 10 months and 4 years)

*Television characters.* While few fathers mentioned anyone as a role model with whom they did not have a personal relationship, a couple of men did mention television characters in passing. In general, these characters were found by the fathers to have very little relationship to the reality of parenting. While seconding this disconnect with reality presented by most television characters, one father recognized that these characters did provide a framework for viewing fatherhood and judging himself as a father.

You know, I never was impressed by too many TV fathers. I mean, Leave it to Beaver, I actually remember watching Leave it to Beaver and some of those shows when I was a little kid, but I never really, I don't think I had any cognitive awareness that that's how fathers should be really. There was a disconnect there. I never really bought it. I guess as far as fathers on TV and stuff like that, they're mostly pretty lame. I haven't really seen any

that I was really impressed with fathers on TV. (Tony, married father of one child age 10 months)

And in terms of generalized expectations, as in those expectations I have absorbed merely by steeping in the media stew that is our society, we've got . . . as men we've got two role models for being a father. One is Ward Cleaver and the other is Bundy, Al Bundy. You've got the horror of a father or you've got the perfect father. And its . . . you're always comparing yourself to those two. I consider myself lucky that I remember vaguely the *Courtship of Eddie's Father* in which Bill Bixby plays a single father and that was a pretty realistic portrayal I think, but for the most part these expectations, these scripts that we are handed by our society, by the media, have no correlation to anything in reality. And yet, we are still comparing ourselves to them. You know, I can't be Ward Cleaver. I can't be Fred McMurray. Oh, god, help me I don't want to be Al Bundy! So that's been a big thing and probably a subconscious touch stone to me in relation to the Ward Cleaver end of it. And a very visceral, my god, very conscious shrinking away from the Al Bundy spectrum. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

### ***Role models for manhood***

Almost half the fathers (n=9) had been raised by single mothers. While some of them still had contact with their fathers, a few (n=4) essentially did not. Two participants' fathers were deceased. These men spoke of their experiences searching for male role models. The men they found in the community, at work, at school, or in their religious community served not just as examples of fatherhood, but also of how to be a man.

### *How role models have shaped parenting*

Several fathers talked about how their role models had shaped the way they parent. Most of the fathers (n=10) indicated that their role models helped them parent by providing an example.

To some degree it's probably me placing what I want to see on what he does. So, it's hard to say what exactly he's responsible for and which things are just my imagination, that I'm putting onto the things that he does. It's based mostly on the relationship that I see with him and the girls interacting. They sometime seek him out as the second choice again, as mom's the comforter. Just his relationship with them has been my observation. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

And so, by looking at other families and by seeing what they produce, what their end result was, I can guess as to what their teaching was that made that child. So, I need to teach my child in such a way that produces the result that I would like. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

By their examples, good and bad. Like with my dad, you know, my dad was definitely an authoritarian when we were younger and definitely had drinking problems. He definitely had anger problems and I think actually one of the questions you ask too about fears was my anger and my anger issues and stuff like that and keeping those, working on them so they don't come up the way they came up with my dad. So, recognizing him as a window. Seeing his anger issues and not wanting to be that way. But also seeing a change in him, particularly when I was a teenager and he went from being really not there and some one who...my concept of father when I was really young was almost like this body without a head. You couldn't really see him. There, but not there. Not always there. But larger than life nonetheless and then seeing him as I grew up and grew older as just a man. But then also watching him kind of confront his demons was a good role model for me. And, also just come to terms with, my dad was a very honest guy and he'll how he felt and he also was very loyal and worked very hard to provide and stuff like that. Those are definitely some attributes that I liked about him a lot and admire. He also had a good sense of humor and took a lot of things in stride and I appreciated that a lot. (Tony, married father of one child age 10 months)



Some fathers spoke of trying to think of what their role model would do in a similar situation.

So, he's probably one of the people I try to be like when I'm having problems, you know, not exactly what would Darrin do, but just trying to be more like him in some ways. Or guess what he's like when I'm around. Especially just being calm... (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

Two of the fathers referred to memories they had as a child of how their fathers interacted with them. These memories served as a guide. For example:

I try to remember how it made me feel I guess. Just the fact that I feel like he didn't do them well is only because it had some kind of reaction in me. Its like, I guess I look at what he did now as much as I can remember and try and analyze that stuff. But most of the stuff that I think he didn't do well is stuff that I think left an impact on me and so I try to look at what that impact was and how it made me feel and what it was, how he handled it that made me feel that way. And if I think there is something I could do different to make my kids not feel unwanted or whatever it happens to be for the situation, then I'll try and do that. If I can't then its like, well, you know...(Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

Yeah sure, just that he had a very close relationship with me, so that was very important to me as a child and so that's...and he was involved and active and played with us after work and you know, he was like a friend when I was growing up and so that's how I want to be with my child. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

### ***Examples of what not to do***

Role models also provided examples of what not to do. Several fathers pointed to particular people and their actions as examples of what they did not want to have happen with their own children.

As a counter example, say someone who was the kind of parent that I knew I did not want to be - the mother of my former roommate. She was first and foremost concerned with being her daughter's friend and showed no disapproval of anything her daughter did and I think that was a bad way to parent. The child had no boundaries. She had no guidance, no discipline in the classic sense of the word. She might have been a great person, but she was a lousy parent. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

...we are often at odds with our parents on various issues, pretty much everything, so we're not really. Pretty much we do the opposite of whatever they mention. That seems to work okay. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

Other fathers found it easier to define themselves and their choices as fathers in contrast to those around them. As one father indicated:

You know, so many times through adolescence, in high school, out of high school, when I went to college, you try to find out who you are, who are you, who are you. You're always trying to search for who you are. And more often than not I'll I came to the conclusion was who I'm not. You see people around you, god, I don't want to be like that and, oh geez, I don't want to be like that, and whew, I definitely don't want to be that way. And I take that in as a parent as well. I see I definitely don't want to be like that. I definitely don't want to be like that. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

Some fathers knew the example they had been shown by their own parents had some areas that needed improvement. These fathers looked for specific examples of how to handle these parenting situations differently.

Yelling and screaming is something that I dealt with in my family. You know, like things like, "Don't you ever do that..." You know, I never want to say that to my kid. I want to sit...I've seen parents sit down with their children and explain the pros and cons of what they're doing and why its better to do something one way than another way and that's more of how I want to be. You know, give them discipline and tell them this is not good to do this, because of this versus just the immediate gratification of having them stop by yelling at them. Okay, so that's an example. (Dave, married father of one child age 9 months)

### *Influence of wife/partner*

An underlining theme present in most of the interviews was a recognition of the significant role the wives and partners of these men played in informing and shaping their actions as fathers. Some fathers relied heavily on their wife as a primary example, such as this father:

Um, a lot of the role models I had for parenting, I never really had much growing up. I was never really around a lot of people who had children and those that had children, I wished being younger I would have paid attention and learned a lot more. Because having kids, it's been a crash course for me on how to do it. A lot of my parenting techniques I'm having to learn as I go and pick up the pieces. A lot of times I'll go along and then I realize that I'm stumbling and I'm doing something wrong and I've got to stop and readjust, constantly. The only person I've got right now for a parenting role model is my wife, because she's really good with the kids. I'm amazed. She was cut out for kids. So, I tend to watch a lot how she does it. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

Other fathers commented on the partnership between parents.

And then there's questions that are kind of up in the air. It's a personal issue. It's a moral issue between yourself and your partner. And its great that my wife and I can actually stay up in bed and talk to each other about, okay, well, how old is it, at what age do we let her stay out past midnight? What age do you let her try makeup? What age do you let her do these things that aren't, there's no book. There's no handbook written. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

Fathers noted a wide variety of role models they used in becoming the father they want to be, ranging from memories of how they were raised to watching other people parent, including community friends or adults, and their current parents' and wife's actions. Some fathers phrased their reactions to

remembered role models as learning what not to do, how not to act, but most took positive lessons from their parents, friends and wives.

**-- Section Five --**  
**How do fathers perceive their impact on the health  
and well-being of their children?**

The quotes and findings in this section address children's health and fathers' perceived roles in their children's health. First, we asked fathers to provide definitions of children's health. Next they talked about how they saw themselves affecting their children's health. Finally, fathers discussed their involvement in children's doctor's visits and sick care.

Before describing their own perceived impact on children's health and well-being, fathers were asked to define a healthy child. They responded with a range of comments about indications of health in children. Many fathers focused on mental or emotional health as primary indicators of health. The children of this study's participants were generally free of chronic physical health concerns. Fathers' statements seemed to indicate an assumption that basic physical health needs of food, clothing and shelter would be met as givens. Therefore their discussion of children's health went beyond these basics.

The following table outlines the three main components of children's health as defined by the participants – mental/emotional health, physical health, and the combination or balance of the two. One column presents the indicators of health and the other records some relevant quotes that capture the essence of the data and the meaning gleaned from participants.

*Table 9 - Description of a "Healthy Child"*

| Component of Health Identified by Participants   | Examples of Comments Made by Participants  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Physical Health</b><br/>Well-fed, not undernourished or overweight, physically healthy, physical needs met, developing normally, disease free, uninjured, active, energetic, exercising, basic medical needs met, safe environment</p>   | <p>Of course there's the physical issues of getting enough to eat, getting enough exercise, getting enough sleep. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)</p> <p>Then just basic physical health like undernourished or overweight. In reasonably good shape and stuff like that. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)</p> <p>I guess healthy primarily is physical, but more and more today it means mental. Healthy child means disease free, processing all their limbs, I guess. Not in any danger of starvation or, which sadly is not the case of a lot of kids in the world, obviously. (Matt, married father of three children ages 4, 8, and 11)</p> <p>One who's not injured. One who eats well or reasonably well. So, I think maybe two of the biggest things are nutrition and diet and the other big thing would be reasonable hygiene. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)</p>  |
| <p><b>Mental/Emotional Health</b><br/>Well-adjusted, Well-behaved, self-control, creative, curious, engaged, secure, alert, anxious to grow, excited, balanced, "filled with own best energy", happy, smile on their face, learning, happy home, healthy relationship with parents, safe environment</p> | <p>Um, let's see, a healthy child. Well adjusted, and you know that whole psychology of adjustment I'm going to take as a given. Well-adjusted, energetic, well-behaved. Because they're getting the love and attention they need. Not because they know that if they don't eat all their peas they're going to get bawled out or something, but because, maybe self-control. An internal locus of control. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)</p> <p>To me a healthy child is creative, either actively or passively. That is to say either Lego blocks, crayons, Lincoln logs, that kind of creativity or you know, reading Dr. Doolittle. Something along those lines. A healthy child is curious. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)</p> <p>Uh, a healthy child, I've always found is a child that's got a smile on their face. Because, you know, they've got clean clothes. Well, you have a little kid so the clothes are only going to be so clean, but you know, it's a difference between how they absolutely just look filthy all the time and you know a healthy child is a child that looks as clean. circumstantial. So, a child that's also healthy is happy and so they tend to have a smile on their face. I always find that is children are real smiley and easy to make laugh, to me that signals a happy child because their needs are being met. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)</p> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>A healthy child would be like basically happy. Able to interact with other kids and like I guess wanting or willing to try new activities. I'm always pushing the kids to do these outdoor activities and stuff. It always bothers me when they just don't want to try stuff for whatever reason. If there is an irrational fear, that's okay, or even a rational fear, but I always feel like it's important to at least be able to articulate what it is that they don't want to do about it. So, I think that's healthy, being able to go try new things like that. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)</p> <p>Safe environment and mentally healthy, which I don't know what that means exactly. Satisfied with their life or confident in their own abilities or comfortable with who they are and where they are around their peers. Informed about making healthy decisions. (Matt, married father of three children ages 4, 8, and 11)</p> <p>And then there, if you really want to be broad, there's mental health and having a reasonably happy home. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)</p> <p>A healthy child is excited about life, in an answer. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)</p>  |
| <p><b>Combination of factors leads to health</b></p> | <p>So, if you've got a happy home and you eat decent and you're not physically injured then you must be a healthy child. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)</p> <p>Happy and active. That's my two word short answer. A healthy child is healthy mentally and happy and comfortable in his living situation and secure and he knows that he has parents that are there to look after him and to help protect him and that he's secure that way and relaxed and he's in an environment where he's happy and able to do things for himself. Independent and part of the whole family and know that he's opinion matters. At the same time, be active and have lots of different interests and things that he can do. That's what I would say. (George, married father of one child age 10 months)</p> <p>Being healthy is...there's so many different sides and parts to it. To me it's the physical part, it's a spiritual part, it's an interactive part, it's a learning part. All of which are in combination and relate. A healthy child is engaged in some way with each of those in developing each of those. (Allen, married father of one child age 2 years)</p> <p>Well, okay, I guess it is to be determined in two ways. Physical health, you can look at them and kind of learn by the tell-tale signs, earlier on when they poop, you know learn to read poop, colors of poop and what kind of things are coming out of them. But then in the other sense of determining health is the more ambivalent way and that's just determining what</p> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <p>kind of things that would be deemed “healthy” for your child – people that are coming by, environments their going to be in. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)</p> <p>I guess there’s just a certain glow sometimes when there’s, if a child’s being raised in a healthy way. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)</p> |
|--|--|

Most of the fathers (n=16) considered their children healthy. As one father stated, “Oh yeah, they’re healthy and loaded up with attitude” (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4). Another father spoke about how there continued to be room for improvement in his parenting, and therefore, in his children’s health.

No. They are. . .by the standards I just laid out my children are not as healthy as they could and should be, because by my standards I am not being as good a father as I could be. I’m not being as good of a dad as I could be. This is not a negative finger pointing affair for me. This is holding myself to my own standards saying, “Look you can do better than this. There is room for improvement.” (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

As indicated by the above comment, many fathers saw themselves and the child’s mother as the single biggest factors impacting the child’s health. The rest of this section describes in more detail this relationship.

All of the fathers talked about how they saw themselves affecting their children’s health. While their definitions of children’s health focused on mental and emotional indicators, such as happiness, when fathers

**Research Question –**  
***How do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children?***

Themes:

- ❖ physical health
- ❖ mental/emotional health
- ❖ doctors’ visits
- ❖ caring for sick children



began describing their affects on their children's health physical indicators figured prominently. For example:

How do I see myself affecting my children's health? Um, I think a child's parents are the single greatest factor in a child's health. Uh, I need to improve my level of functioning. You know in those end-of-year performance appraisal things, I need to get a better score. So my children can be healthier. I mean, I could easily argue that I'm not giving my children all the love and attention they deserve, so by my own definition they're not as healthy as they could be. Yeah, they're getting fed. They're getting exercise. They're being to a greater or lesser degree intellectually stimulated. Health is more than physical. Health and well-being. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

At this point kind of limited other than being kind to her. I don't feed her much, so mom's got that department for the most part. I keep her healthy taking care of...I'm thinking more mental health when you ask that question. 'Cus the other to me is kind of a given, because I would never have...I would never treat a child, especially of mine, you know, not taking care of their physical needs in terms of brushing their teeth and making sure they get good food and dressed warm and all that stuff. But, I think that I'm attentive to her. I think when I ignore her it's limited...teaching her how to soothe herself. I comfort her when...play with her a lot with her toys and...we play music together and I think that that's pretty much limited to all we can do right now. So, I think I affect her positively. (Dave, married father of one child age 9 months)

### ***Physical health***

Fathers spoke of their impacts on a wide range of physical health issues.

Diet and food choices figured prominently. Many felt that nutrition was the primary health aspect under their control, whether this involved monitoring the food eaten by the children, setting an example of good diet choices, or supporting the breastfeeding practices of the child's mother.

Number one is that I try to watch their diet. I try to see that they eat very little junk food. A diet is a very big thing with me. I try to watch my kids' diet. I always try to make sure they're clean. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

I'm probably a really bad influence on their health, just from all my really poor habits. That's probably not really true. I don't drink a lot, anymore (laughter), but I like junk food and stuff like that, but we don't eat stuff like that. But I don't like make them think, you can't have that stuff, it's really bad. We don't eat that kind of stuff as a rule, but I think its okay to eat cheese burgers and stuff, so they see that and they know that it's okay. I guess, if they always grew up knowing that that's not a good thing, then that would be much better for them, but they've seen. It's a change of life style from what I was given growing up. I had a horrible diet as a kid and ate really bad food and my parents fed me terrible, so I had to change my own eating habits and lifestyle as an adult. And so, that affects them too. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

Well, something that Nicola does that I don't do, well I guess I do it too because we're intertwined...as far as eating healthier meals as far as making sure that his food is good for him. And I guess breast feeding is a life choice that mostly Nicola bears the imprint or impact of that decision, but it's something that we're both really in favor of, though I don't do anything to help out with that other than be supportive and try and make sure that we have meals that are good for her and remind her to take her vitamins and stuff like that. So, I guess that would be a big area of concern. Once he starts eating solid food, which I guess is coming up, then that will be something else that we can look at. Just making sure that he's getting good food. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

Fathers' commitment to eating together as a family showed the interaction of different aspects of health. One father spoke of the importance of sitting together to eat. Dinner time was considered a shared activity in his house growing up, and he was passing that on to his own children.

We all eat together as a family. Do things as a family. None of us eat separately. We learn that it is a cohesive unit. Because that's what...in my house dinner's on and you're all sitting down and that's just it. Dinners on and my dad...no matter how busy we all are, we're going to eat together and do things together. So, no matter how busy we are... (John, married father of one child age 5)

Beyond diet, another component of physical health commented on by father was physical activity or exercise. When fathers were questioned about what kinds of activities they engaged in with their children, outdoor activities received the most mention (n=40). Examples of such activities include: hiking, biking, playing sports, going to the park, and camping.

Probably on the positive side, just that I believe in all these outdoor activities and I want them to do that kind of stuff. That's probably a positive. Not every kid skateboards with his dad when he's five years old and not every kid gets pushed down Black Diamond ski runs when he's six, like Josh was. Just for the record, since we're recording this, I didn't really push him down. He forced me to let him go down. So, I think that's good for them. I want them to be able to play golf and go skiing and bike riding and all that other stuff. Life has got to be so much more than television and computers and all that stuff. So, that's probably the positive impact on their health, I think. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

Participants recognized the links between the components of health. They felt physical health supported mental/emotional health and vice versa. For example:

Yes. They enjoy physical activity. They enjoy games where there is physical exertion. Christian went from being this frail preemie asthmatic...well, he still uses an inhaler, he has a couple of different kinds for his asthma...but he looks like a fish in water. That's one of the things that stuck, so...they're not lounge lizards. They enjoy being outside. Activities. But, I think they are. The feedback we get back from friends, teachers, I think they are well-adjusted emotionally for the most part. So, there again I kind of lumped mental and physical health together. (Jim, married father of two children ages 5 and 9)

One particular health issue mentioned by several fathers of infants and very young children, such as this father, was decisions regarding children's immunizations. Several men spoke of mixed feelings about which immunizations

to give to their children and the possible health consequences for their children that might result from these decisions.

Which is another issue to bring up. I'm not sure if this is in your questionnaire, but immunization...we haven't done anything yet and I'm not sure if we are. We've had countless conversations about it and heard out, Cindy's father who is an emergency room doctor, even though he's a real liberal, exceptionally liberal, he still has some sort of belief in science and the whole like pros and cons of immunization, he's a little bit more pro where as we'd be a little bit more con because there's a lot of info out on the net and probably other places, Mothering Magazine and stuff, about the downfalls of immunizations. So, I mean, some of it a little bit concerning either way. Like when we went to the Oregon Country Fair we knew that she wasn't immunized and we knew that there was probably a lot of people there who probably weren't immunized as well. So, we were a little bit concerned, but we just decided not to go with the fear, you know. We decided to go with the, you know, we're just going to go with the, we know she's healthy. We're doing everything possible to provide an environment where she is healthy. And we're healthy. Our immune systems are really good. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)

Along with concerns around immunizations choices, the other specific lifestyle choice or physical health decision most frequently brought up by fathers was breastfeeding. Other fathers expressed particular concern over the time their children spent engaged in "screen time," for example watching movies or playing computer games.

### ***Mental/emotional health***

In addition to physical health, many fathers discussed their role in their children's mental and emotional health. This role centered about creating a loving, supportive and safe home and family. As one father states:

I think I play a big role in their mental health in that they know they're in a loving home. And I do the best I can to get them to eat better and you know make sure they're safe. They're supervised enough so that they don't hurt themselves. (John, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

Well, at this point we make a lot of choices about what enters her reality, whether that is food or atmosphere emotionally, energy levels, what kind of things she's exposed to whether that's even physically. So, right now, between me and her mother we are completely responsible for her health. If she's not healthy it's our fault. Now, kids do get sick, but I think that's part of becoming a more healthy adult, is building up immunities to things like germs. Even things like aggressive people, you have to build up immunities to things like that. So, it's our responsibility not to just shelter her from those things, but to expose them to her in a safe environment. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

At different points during the interviews, many of the participants brought up television, movies, computers, and computer games as health concerns. Parents made active decisions to limit or eliminate their children's exposure to "screen time." One father explained his family's choices and recognized that what worked for his family may not be appropriate for all parents and children.

I know we'll continue to do it as best we can. I don't think we're too over the top. I don't think we're too anal about the different things that are going to happen to her. We know that some things are going to happen. Oh, a big, huge, key thing is we don't show her TV or movies or any of those types of images on the screen. The closest thing is like our computer. Sometimes she'll see pictures and stuff that I have when I have photos open and stuff like that, but, otherwise no TV. She won't have TV at least until she's two and we'll try and minimize it as much as possible. We feel that that's healthy, big time. Just kind of really strengthens their attention span in my mind. A lot of the parents just kind of sit their children in front of the TV and I just kind of get sad thinking, man, oh man, but of course I was brought up that way. In my own little way, I turned out okay. There again is that call. I don't feel like I can make a judgment on other people's kids. I can only make one on my own. (Roger, partnered father of one child age 1 year)

### *Doctor's visits*

Participants most frequently (n=12) indicated that both parents accompany the child when a child needs to see the doctor for well-baby check-ups or other routine care. Mothers were seen as the primary emotional support for children in this situation, but fathers felt their presence strengthened the experience for the child and provided needed support.

Um, let's see, doctor stuff, we don't take them to the doctor all that often given our philosophical stance there. However, when we do take a child to the doctor, usually both of us go. If it is possible to leave the other child with my parents or a friend, failing that usually Anne goes and I'll stay home with the other child. And I think this is because, again as I mentioned early, there's a much more emotional bond between mother and child and she feels, and I agree with her, that the child feels safer with mom in that situation than she would with me. (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4)

That's one of those things, we work so well as a team, my wife and I, that Cade, our daughter, just falls right into that same team. When one of us isn't there we just don't seem to work as well together, or, you know, work as well without each other. So, I think at least for the first time she gets a shot, I want to be there with her. And mom's got to be there. Mom is an emotional well. Our daughter can take from mom as much as she needs. Which is good in traumatic experiences such as doctor's offices. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

Work schedules proved to be challenging for some fathers. A few fathers (n=4) chose, or were able, to take time off from work in order to accompany their children to doctor's appointments. Others (n=4) sometimes relied on the children's mothers to accomplish this task.

Any time my kids have to go for a doctor's appointment, especially for shots or something, I always take the time off. I find it, even if, I feel it's important for me to be there with them, because they don't like getting

shots. Nobody likes getting shots really. If you do like getting shots there's something wrong with you. But, I feel that my kids need to know if I'm there with them, I want them to know that they can depend on me if they need me. (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4)

We both go. All the well baby things we both go, if we take him in for the every other week look at this new rash visit, then Nicola usually goes alone for that. Since, the advice is invariably, you should change his diaper a lot and give him lots of naked time and use something. They'll some times give us new stuff to try that usually doesn't work to get rid of his rash. Nicola usually does those now. (James, married father of one child age 10 months)

A few of the fathers (n=4) commented that this task always, or usually, fell to the mothers. Reasons for this varied from work schedule conflicts to the fathers' belief that the child's mother provided more emotional support and was more capable of gathering all the appropriate information from the doctor.

We used to always go together, like religiously when Michael was little. But after awhile it got to be...it was a big impact on my job and I came to the realization that most of the time it's not a big deal. I was taking two and three hours out of work to sit in rooms and just find out that he's got a cold virus or something like that, so I sort of reluctantly let that go to Sarah after awhile. So, it's mostly her. I seldom go anymore. If it's something serious, I'll go. You know, Sarah always asks the right questions and she does all the right stuff. I can't even remember all the stuff my own doctor tells me, so it's better with Sarah there anyway. So, she goes and I get all the low down when she gets back. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

My wife. I don't think I've ever been. Except for the weekends or at night with an accident or sore throat or something, that's the only time I've ever been in the doctor's office with my kids. (Matt, married father of three children ages 4, 8, and 11)

One father who does not live with his older children, but has shared custody with his ex-wife, discussed a variety of doctor's appointments that he has juggled with his children.

... for example, recently I asked... I've been concerned because Grace has glasses and I want to make sure that they're the right kind and so I emailed my ex-wife to tell her that I would like to come to Portland and be at the next eye doctor appointment, so I went with the girls for their testing and did all that kind of stuff. So, in terms of their institutional care, for them I'm fully involved although I don't take them to most things because I don't live with them. You know, for Asa, Sandy and I talk about everything and we will ultimately, probably agree on a limited range of inoculations for Asa, but we haven't had that happen yet. But we've been to the pediatrician together. Both pediatricians, because we didn't really like the first one that we went to. So, either, in both circumstances only exigency is separating who does what. We're all very interested and very informed. (Bill, divorced and re-partnered father of three children ages 10 months, 8 years, and 10 years)

He felt that with all his children's health issues he was actively informed and engaged.

### *Caring for sick children*

Half the fathers (n=10) indicated that both parents assumed roles in caring for sick children. For some families fathers reported filling a support role to the mother and children. For example:

Whoever is here. We both do. But, if I'm at work, obviously it's Sarah that does it. So, mostly it's a mommy thing, but I think they like it too when I take care of them also. I bring them stuff. (Dan, married father of two children ages 6 and 9)

For other families, divisions in roles fell into tasks. One father indicated, "If there's puke involved, it's me" (Dmitri, married father of two children ages 6 and 4). Another father described being responsible for dispensing medicine or taking temperatures. As he stated, "Oh yeah, giving them medicine and stuff like



that. Taking their temperature. I'm actually the, what is it, the 'daddy medicine'" (Hank, married father of two children ages 2 and 4).

Generally descriptions of sick care conveyed a sense that participants felt involved and nurturing toward their children during illness. Fathers seemed particularly concerned with filling this role and supporting the family as a whole - the child, the mother, and himself - in order to ensure recovery of all. For example:

Well, we both do. You know it's harder on the parents than it is on the kid to be sick, I gotta tell ya. You know, the parents are the ones that have to listen to her sneezing, coughing, choking, and not getting sleep. The parents get less sleep than the kid does. The kid can sleep through most of it and the parents aren't. So, we take turns. We're pretty 50/50 on it. One of the nice things about breast feeding is that anti-bodies are formed in the breast milk which help the child get healthy sooner. Unfortunately it means that the illness is usually passed on to the mother. And so, during this last sickness I stayed home and I took care of everybody. Everybody got sick in the house, I took care of everybody and then I got sick and then I got taken care of. So, you know, it goes around. We all have to work together. (Brian, married father of one child age 7 months)

Participants who do not live with their children full-time discussed how they engage in sick care for their children. One father described nurturing and pampering he provides his older children whenever he has the opportunity to affect colds or other routine illness.

Well, frankly, because I don't have Grace and Talia all the time, when I have them I am very nurturing and attentive and so if they're ever sick in Eugene, which, you know, they have colds and stuff, I just make sure they that they get to bed early and make sure that they get bubble baths and make sure that they get some good food in them and get a lot of sleep and just care for them. (Bill, divorced and re-partnered father of three children ages 10 months, 8 years, and 10 years)

Another father who spends every other weekend with his children spoke of arguing his case for being allowed to participate in sick care of his children.

Umm, generally, she'll do that. If I'm scheduled to see them and they're sick, then I'll get them. I was able to argue that early on when we went to court that we are both capable of taking care of the kids and if one child's sick then we each understand that we have a level of competence that enables us to at least take care of their illness and that being sick and not being allowed to visit the parent is just as harmful as anything else. They need to be communicated to that both parents are loving and capable and they can care for them. (Tom, divorced father of two children ages 4 and 7)

Participants described their own perceptions of their impacts on their children's health and well-being. In order to frame these impacts, fathers first defined healthy children, pointing to mental/emotional health and physical health as the primary aspects. Following this, participants described their involvement in their children's trips to the doctor and caring for sick children. Generally, these fathers presented themselves as actively concerned with and involved in their children's health. They felt that parents were the single greatest impact on children's health and well-being.

## **-- Chapter 5 -- DISCUSSION**

During this study, 20 fathers of young children were interviewed to gain insight into the role of fatherhood, the factors that influence its development, and how they perceive their impact on their children's health and well-being. The men interviewed seemed to be involved fathers. Much of their lives and their identities were tied to their role as the father of their children. In response to this, all the fathers actively struggled with how to be the best parent they could be.

Though all of the fathers were parenting young children, some of the fathers were first time parents and others had older children as well. As a result an interesting range of experiences were captured. Those whose transition to fatherhood was recent focused much more heavily on the adjustment to the new role. Fathers of older children tended to focus more on parenting techniques and responses to the changing needs of their children.

Participants talked about relying heavily on the support systems around them. In some cases, this meant actively talking through issues or seeking advice. For others, this manifested as a reflective examination of the roles the people around them assumed. Wives or partners, parents, and friends who were currently parenting were particularly valuable sources of support. Several fathers focused on the importance of their relationship with their wives or partners. Just as women in previous studies have reported their relationship with potential fathers to be an

important factor in their decisions to continue a pregnancy (Grady et al, 1996; Fischer et al, 1999; Zabin et al, 2000), participants in this study indicated their decision to father was heavily influenced by their relationship with a current partner. Many fathers cited their relationship as a significant factor in their willingness or ability to parent. Additionally, the mothers provided examples of how to parent and guidance through difficult transitions of parenting. Many of the fathers spoke of joint decision-making and mutual support between the parents as cornerstones to their parenting experience.

For the participants, areas of struggle included financial responsibility, the challenge of parenting, and the sense that parenting (particularly fathering) is different than it used to be and old roles no longer apply (thus leading some to question the value or applicability of what they learned by example from their parents). The results of the study corresponded to previous research conducted on men prior to fatherhood (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Just as in the current study, Marsiglio et al. (2000) found several factors interrelated with father readiness, including relationships and professional stability. In Marsiglio's (2000) study, fathers' visions of good fathering included providing economically and being present with children, which this study also found. Each of these challenges led to attempts by the individual father and the couple to find personalized and flexible definitions of the roles of mother and father.

While these individually chosen roles of parenting often looked stereotypical to the outsider (for example, dad working full-time and mom at home

with the kids), the participants in this study presented their choices as more complex and fluid. Parenting roles of both mothers and fathers tended to have flexibility over time with fathers finding themselves more actively involved in caring for the children and the home than expected. Also, according to the participants, several of the mothers worked full-time or part-time or attended school in plans for future work. The fathers seemed to view their current roles as open to future change and adjustment, and they often described changes that had occurred in their families as they grew up. These results echoed earlier studies which found parenthood to be an individual journey of self-development and learning (Young, 1999). Instead of following prescribed roles, fathers and mothers were moving toward more individualized definitions of parenting.

The broad discussion of the role of fathers provided context for understanding the more specific role fathers play in children's health. Fathers defined children's health and well-being largely in terms of mental and emotional health. This may have reflected their sense that the physical health needs of their children would be taken care of as a matter of course. Meeting the mental and emotional health needs of their children was seen as more of a challenge. Fathers viewed their role in their children's overall health as creating a positive and healthy environment for the children to grow and flourish. This environment was described in terms of positive and healthy family relationships, establishing healthy habits, and protecting the family from negative outside influences.

Fathers in this study had a very broad view of a healthy child, discussing both mental and emotional health as well as physical health as indicators of a healthy child. None of the fathers had any children with chronic health problems so their views were about typically healthy children. Related to mental and emotional health, fathers described a healthy child as well-adjusted, well-behaved, curious, secure, happy, smiling and creative. In many ways, the fathers' view of their parenting roles and involvement with their children seemed to focus more on the mental and emotional health and well-being of their children. They wanted to provide a loving dependable relationship, new experiences, and teach them new skills to promote their self-confidence and abilities. The physical health of the child seemed more predictable and controllable for them, in terms of promoting good nutrition, rest, hygiene and exercise.

Fathers actively engaged in the health care of their children. Fathers of younger children usually attended visits to the doctor and check-ups along with the mother. This changed somewhat as the children aged with parents making choices about who went to doctors visits based on scheduling and availability issues. Most often mothers went, but at times fathers also were the ones to do this. Regardless of whether or not they accompanied their children, fathers expressed strong interest in staying informed and actively involved in decision-making around health issues of their children.

Both parents provided care for sick children. As mothers were most often the primary care takers, they provided the majority of the care. However, fathers

spoke of providing care when they were available. Fathers spoke of both the mothers and the fathers being an emotional support during children's sickness. Also, depending on the family one or both parent dispensed medicine and monitored children's return to health. In most cases fathers saw themselves as equally capable of and interested in caring for their children.

The exploratory nature of this study allowed for overlapping theoretical influences on its design. The ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1986) and further expanded to apply to fatherhood by Bolte et al. (2003) described the concentric influences of the individual characteristics of the father, his immediate environment, such as family, the relative harmony of these components and their interactions, the surrounding values of the culture, and the time of the occurrence of fatherhood along the lifespan of the man. These influences all came together to inform the development of the individual father and his role. The complexity of this theoretical construction, in particular the recognition of the broad range of interrelated influences affecting fatherhood and the individual man's perception of the role were reflected in the results of this study. Fathers spoke of their readiness for fatherhood as influenced by their own experiences, their comfort with their own childhood, their role models for parenting, and, perhaps most importantly, their relationship with their wife or partner. Participants reflected on the interrelatedness of various aspects of their lives, such as work, community, friendships and family, and how being a father impacted all other decisions.

While concord or discord between these various aspects were not specifically reflected upon by participants, a consistent theme regarding the challenge of finding balance among the conflicting demands was remarked on by most fathers. Many men spoke of how being a father came first. However, being a father meant meeting a vast range of related needs such as financial security, relationship stability with partner or spouse, and making time for giving attention to the child or children being parented.

Cultural values seemed of less importance to the participants than personal values. However, many of the men commented on how their own fathers had shaped their concept of fatherhood and they themselves were striving to continue in the tradition of their fathers while adapting to current societal or personal circumstances. Also, clearly many of the men had assumed the cultural role of economic provider for their families. Depending on the age and professional circumstances of the individual man, this aspect of fatherhood received more or less attention during the interview. Participants who were younger and as a result less professionally stable described the struggle to meet the economic needs of the family more readily. Older or more professionally secure fathers gave voice to this aspect of fatherhood, but then gave it little focus.

The developmental perspective, developed by Parke (2000) focused more on understanding fathers' impacts on children's development. This theory was useful to this study as it detailed many angles for examining father involvement in children's lives. Aspects of this theory included individual influences, family,



informal support systems, institutional or formal support systems, and cultural influences. This study examined the expectations and perceptions of men regarding their roles as fathers. These expectations and perceptions were found to be informed, in part, by their own family of origin, the husband-wife relationship, and attitudes about gender roles in the family. Parke determined each of these areas to be of particular relevance to father involvement. In concurrence with Parke's developmental perspective other areas of importance were also noted. These included personal characteristics and perspectives of the father, the overall family relationships of mother-father-children, and the additional relationships with friends and extended family.

A third theory supplied an important component to the examination of the results of this study. Lamb et al (1987) described three dimensions of father involvement with children – engagement, availability, and responsibility. Results of this study reflected all three levels of involvement, with variation occurring between fathers and at different times along the lives of the children. Responsibility was a consistent and strong theme throughout the interviews. Often this responsibility meant assuming economic support for the family in order to provide for the material needs of the family and allow the mother the flexibility of working or not working outside the home. Fathers paid for children's activities, children's schooling, health care, and other needs. Though participants indicated that most often mothers took on the role of arranging activities or assuring that doctors' appointments were set up, fathers also reported limited involvement in

these activities. Their involvement was often restricted by their work hours and duties.

All of the fathers spoke about being available to their children. Many found this to be a particular challenge as many different schedules and demands on time were juggled. Often this availability corresponded with time fathers spent taking care of housekeeping and other family related responsibilities. Many fathers spoke of time they set aside specifically to engage with their children. For some this meant having a special time of the day to interact with their child or children, often the morning before going to work. For others this meant carving periods of time out of their work week to allow for one-on-one time with their kids. For still others this meant having a flexible work schedule that would allow them to be involved in special events in their children's lives.

Regardless of exactly how the individual father chose to structure his involvement in his children's lives, each father's comments clearly reflected an understanding of Lamb et al. 's (1987) three dimensions of involvement. This study did not attempt to precisely measure the father's relative importance of each of the three responsibilities, but rather used this construct to help develop questions and assess the findings. This study's results confirmed these dimensions were reflected in the fathers' view of their roles as fathers.

There were several limitations to this study. A larger and more diverse sample may have included a wider range of experiences, particularly in regards to divorced fathers or other fathers who do not reside with their children full-time.

The sample was also limited in another regard. Due to both the nature of the study, the lack of incentive for participation, and the recruitment sources, the participants tended to be involved fathers. Participants were recruited through a Montessori School, flyers in community areas, and mothers groups. These sources tended to create an atmosphere conducive to involved parenting.

The exploratory nature of the study acted as both a strength and a limitation. Data gathered included rich background material which lent insight into the context of fatherhood for the participants. However, because the interviews were a one time event occurring after the men had become fathers, it was difficult to get an accurate sense of the expectations of fatherhood prior to becoming a father. Additionally, the data relied heavily on men's memories of their changes in expectations from pre-fatherhood to fatherhood. While this supplemental and contextual information served to paint a picture of the situation in which specific decisions were made and activities carried out around children's health and well-being, little data were collected on the actual events or caretaking strategies.

This research provides an important first step in filling the gaps in public health's understanding of the role of fathers in children's health and well-being. Fathers' own experiences and perspectives were recorded in order to begin establishing a context for gathering future data that may more accurately capture the experiences of fathers rather than working from the assumption that fathers are merely a substitute for and have the same views as mothers. This research

suggests that the context of the individual family and the choices made by mothers and fathers in regards to meeting the demands of parenting and reflecting the values of the individual and the family as a whole warrants further study. This study demonstrated that using stereotypes of families and of typical mother and father roles may not be productive in understanding the actual family dynamics. According to the results of this study, different families arrived at different solutions in order to meet the overall needs of that particular family. To obtain a more accurate understanding of the dynamics of the individual family, future research should collect data from both mothers and fathers, and perhaps children as well, on the roles the individuals play in the family.

In addition to overarching research on fatherhood, more work needs to be done in examining the specific activities of fathers in relation to their children's health. Some of the aspects of health that could use further examination are: how fathers' (and mothers') daily habits affect children's own development of healthy habits, the specific caretaking roles fathers engage in in relation to children's health (for example dispensing medicine, staying home from work, night time care giving, and preparing meals), and the routines around exercise, sleep, hygiene, and eating that are established or supported by fathers. Do fathers or mothers take the lead in establishing the standards and routines for such important childhood practices?

Additional research could also be conducted to gain more insight and understanding into the complex relationship between children, mothers, fathers

and institutionalized care settings. According to this study, fathers often accompany their children to doctors' visits and well-baby check-ups. This study suggests that as children age fathers may be less likely in some cases to attend these visits. The study also suggests that fathers remain actively involved in healthcare decisions even after they no longer interface with the healthcare providers directly. Future research could examine the impact of this involvement on children's care and could provide recommendations on how to support fathers' continued role in formalized healthcare settings serving their children.

### ***Results of Research Questions***

This study sought answers to four research questions. First, what are men's expectations of fatherhood? Participants cited several specific expectations they remember from holding before they became fathers. Primarily they were excited about their upcoming role in a child's life and looked forward to sharing love and activities with their child. Many fathers spoke of how role models served to shape their expectations of their experience of fatherhood. Other fathers discussed fears they held prior to becoming a father. These fears included loss of freedom and change of identity. Still other fathers indicated they had no expectations prior to fatherhood.

Second, the study asked how have these expectations changed after becoming fathers? Most fathers indicated that they found parenting to be much

harder than they had expected. One of the challenges of parenting was the difficulties in juggling schedules and finding time for involvement in their children's lives while meeting other responsibilities, such as the economic needs of the family. There was a sense on the part of all the fathers that fatherhood impacts everything else in their lives, including employment choices, where to live, and relationships with extended family.

Third, the research asked what factors or role models shape and influence these expectations? Fathers cited many role models who impacted their parenting choices and styles. Most commonly these role models were parents including fathers, mothers, step-parents, and parents-in-law. Additionally, some fathers who had been raised by single mothers discussed their role models for manhood as being intertwined with their role models for fathering. Role models helped to shape participants' parenting in a variety of ways. Some provided guidance on particular parenting issues. Others were general examples of desired traits, such as honesty and caring. Still others were examples of what not to be. A primary influence discussed by most fathers was the importance of their wife or partner and the impact she had on shaping him as a parent.

Finally, the study asked how do fathers perceive their impact on the health and well-being of their children? Fathers saw themselves, along with their children's mothers, as being the primary influence on their children's health. Participants described their involvement in shaping their children's mental and emotional health by providing a safe, loving home, as well as their physical health

by monitoring their children's diet and encouraging exercise. More than half of the fathers always accompanied their children to doctors' visits. All the fathers discussed ways that they are involved in caring for their children when they are sick.

### ***Conclusion***

Results of this study suggest that there is much yet to be learned about fathers, their perceptions and expectations of fatherhood and their role in their children's health and well-being. The development of fatherhood as a role and an identity is complex and draws influence from a range of sources. In turn, this identity continues to develop as the child grows in age and ability and the father matures into his new identity. Fathers' roles in children's health and well-being reflect this complexity.

This initial study found considerable general support for several theories of parental involvement in children's development, such as those developed by Bronfenbrenner (YEAR), Parke (2000) and Lamb et al. (1987). The fathers described a high level of involvement in their children's lives and conscious reflection on how to develop their parenting skills and roles to reflect models of parenting they view positively. Fathers discussed parenting as multi-dimensional and interactive. To a large degree, these fathers viewed their involvement in their children's health care and developing healthy habits as only one aspect of being a

good parent. Thus this study confirmed that the broader understanding of how fathers view their roles as fathers is important to be able to more fully understand how they view their roles as helping their children to be healthy and develop healthy habits.



## **Chapter 6**

### **- CONCLUSION -**

State and county public health agencies focus a tremendous amount of money and their programs on getting preventive and primary health care to children. It is a central mission for public health, and is critical to the overall health of our population as they grow up and age. Yet little research has examined how fathers view their roles as fathers, and, more specifically, how fathers view what is a healthy child and how they can contribute to their children's good health. This qualitative study, based on a sample of twenty men ages 25-54 living in two communities in Oregon who have one to three children, has begun to develop some foundational understanding of fathers' views on these issues.

The findings paint a picture of very involved fathers, who care deeply about their children, who pay attention to how to become better fathers, and who make time in busy lives to spend time regularly playing with and teaching their children. This study also finds that fathers are aware of basic healthy habits children need to acquire, such as eating nutritious foods, brushing their teeth and practicing good hygiene, engaging in routine exercise, and learning safe habits about play. Most fathers indicated that they felt a responsibility to help their children learn these habits, and these decisions were made jointly with the mothers even when the parents were divorced or no longer living together. Fathers did not see most of these efforts as being the sole province of the mothers, and wanted to

be involved in making decisions on their children's health and medical care, even if they were not always able to go to well-child medical visits.

Hopefully, this study's information can be useful to public health delivery. At least three recommendations can be developed. First, fathers would seem to be more likely to be involved in taking their children to receive medical care if the clinics and doctors had evening or weekend hours when the fathers are off work. Second, this study's findings also point to the importance of reaching fathers to educate them about children health issues, and not just relying on avenues, such as mothers' magazines, geared at reaching out to mothers. Third, there is evidence that fathers' view their children's health as involving good mental and emotional development as well as being free from disease. Furthermore, fathers seem to feel more insecure in knowing how to foster good mental health than the more circumscribed sphere of physical health. Thus public health for this generation of fathers may need to expand programs and literature on how to foster well-adjusted and self-confident children as well as how to protect against disease and illness. Many fathers also discussed healthy children as children who are not overweight and who participate in sports or outside activities, thus programs of preventing obesity and unhealthy eating and social behaviors may find a receptive audience in this generation of fathers.

This research also raises some fundamental questions which need to be answered through further and extended research. First, a broader range of fathers in more diverse socio-economic situations needs to be included in future studies.

This study did not interview single dads or fathers outside the age range of 25-53. The fathers in this study were primarily middle-class and employed or with employment histories. Second, participants were dads with young children. It would be insightful to compare men's perceptions of these topics before they are fathers and when their children are grown up with fathers parenting young children. There would also be some interesting generational comparisons as well as comparisons based on stage in life for fathers. Third, more specific development of how fathers attend to their children's health and what they see their role in their children's health could be developed, emphasizing both mental/emotional health as well as physical health. It would be helpful to public health to better understand the factors that parents use in deciding when (and whether) to seek medical care for preventive health (such as vaccinations and well-child check-ups) as well as when to seek medical intervention for more serious illnesses.

Fathers play an important role in their children's development. This study has illuminated more clearly how fathers perceive their roles as fathers and as custodians of their children's health and development.

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## - APPENDIX A-

| Pseudonym (wife, children)                    | Point of contact | Location  | Age | Number of Children and ages                        | Marital status                             | Father's Work                                   | Wife's work                 | Race/ ethnicity           |
|---|------------------|-----------|-----|--|--|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Dmitri (Anne, Jade, Orion)                    | Flyer            | Corvallis | 36  | - 2 - girl age 6, boy age 4                        | Married                                    | Graduate student in library science             | N/A                         | Latino                    |
| Hank (Adrianne, Preston, Morgan)              | Flyer            | Corvallis | 27  | - 2 - boy age 4, girl age 3                        | Married                                    | Assembly (Full-time)                            | N/A                         | White                     |
| Dan (Sarah, Michael, Josh)                    | CMS              | Corvallis | 36  | - 2 - boy age 9, boy age 6                         | Married                                    | Systems engineer (full-time)                    | Part-time student           | White                     |
| James (Nicola, Zeke)                          | Mom's group      | Eugene    | 30  | - 1 - boy age 10 months                            | Married                                    | Research assistant (full-time)                  | N/A                         | White                     |
| Matt (Jen, Andrew, Ben, Sophia)               | CMS              | Corvallis | 44  | - 3 - boy age 11, boy age 8, girl age 4            | Married                                    | HP (full-time)                                  | N/A                         | White                     |
| John (Kim, Ian)                               | CMS              | Corvallis | 41  | - 1 - boy age 5                                    | Married                                    | Just finishing graduate school (full-time)      | N/A                         | White                     |
| Stephen (no names mentioned during interview) | CMS              | Corvallis | 33  | - 2 - boy age 4, boy age 2                         | Married                                    | Civil engineer (full-time)                      | Full-time                   | White                     |
| Jim (Meg, Christian, Paul)                    | CMS              | Albany    | 54  | - 2 - boy age 9, boy age 5                         | Married                                    | Development engineer (full-time)                | Full-time                   | White                     |
| Jason (Becca, Jeremy, Brie)                   | Mom's group      | Eugene    | 29  | - 2 - boy age 6, girl age 3                        | Married                                    | Assistant Special Education Teacher (full-time) | Part-time                   | Latino (Mexican-American) |
| Bill (Sandy, Grace, Talia, Asa)               | Referral         | Eugene    | 44  | - 3 - girl age 10, girl age 8, 1 boy age 10 months | Divorced (2 children), Partnered (1 child) | Lawyer (full-time)                              | Ex – full-time<br>Part-time | White                     |
| Brian (Angela, Cade)                          | Referral         | Eugene    | 28  | - 1 - girl age 7 months                            | Married                                    | Carpenter (full-time)                           | N/A                         | White                     |

| <b>Pseudonym<br/>(wife,<br/>children)</b>     | <b>Point of<br/>contact</b> | <b>Location</b>              | <b>Age</b> | <b>Number<br/>of<br/>Children<br/>and ages</b>            | <b>Marital<br/>status</b>                 | <b>Father's<br/>Work</b>                                 | <b>Wife's<br/>work</b> | <b>Race/<br/>ethnicity</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---|---|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ari (Jillian,<br>Emma,<br>Simon)              | Mom's<br>group              | Eugene                       | 33         | - 2 -<br>girl age 4,<br>boy age<br>10 months              | Married                                   | Assistant<br>teacher &<br>waitperson<br>(full-time)      | N/A                    | White                      |
| George<br>(Nancy,<br>Mason)                   | CMS                         | Eugene                       | 39         | - 1 -<br>boy age 6  | Married                                   | Film<br>production<br>(part-time)<br>full-time<br>parent | Full-time              | White                      |
| Tom (ex-<br>Pam,<br>Hayden,<br>Preston)       | CMS                         | Corvallis<br>Moved to<br>SLC | 40         | - 2 -<br>girl age 7,<br>boy age 4                         | Divorced<br>(2<br>children),<br>Partnered | Psychologist<br>(full-time)                              | Ex – full-<br>time     | White                      |
| Jordan<br>(wife,<br>Lucas, Tina,<br>baby)     | Flyer                       | Corvallis                    | 36         | - 3 -<br>boy age 5,<br>girl age 2,<br>baby age<br>4 month | Married                                   | (full-time)  | Full-time              | Caribbean                  |
| Allen (Kris,<br>Anne)                         | Referral                    | Corvallis                    | 36         | - 1 -<br>girl age 2                                       | Married                                   | Professor<br>(full-time)                                 | Part-time              | White                      |
| Wayne<br>(Terry, Sam,<br>Stephanie,<br>Trent) | Referral                    | Eugene                       | 34         | - 3 -<br>1 boy age<br>10, 1 girl<br>age 7, 1<br>boy age 4 | Separated,<br>living<br>with<br>partner   | Sergeant in<br>Army                                      | Ex – N/A               | White                      |
| Tony (Tina,<br>Ian)                           | Referral                    | Eugene                       | 33         | - 1 -<br>boy age<br>10 months                             | Married                                   | Wilderness<br>therapy for<br>teens                       | N/A                    | White                      |
| Dave (Amy,<br>Adele)                          | Mom's<br>group              | Eugene                       | 39         | - 1 -<br>girl age 9<br>months                             | Married                                   | Contractor,<br>pilot                                     | Part-time              | White                      |
| Roger<br>(Cindy,<br>Jasper)                   | Mom's<br>group              | Eugene<br>(Portland)         | 28         | - 1 -<br>girl age 1                                       | Partnered                                 | Counselor at<br>teen shelter                             | N/A                    | White                      |

**- APPENDIX B -**

*Fathers' Perceptions of Their Impact on Children's Health and Well-being: An Exploratory Study*

Purpose:

I am interested in interviewing you about your life as a father. Through one-on-one interviews, I want to find out about your expectations of fatherhood, how these expectations changed after you became a father, who your role models were, and how you see yourself impacting your children's health.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate you will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes and the interview will be audio-taped.

Risks and Benefits:

This research involves no more than minimal risk to you as a participant. It is possible that our discussion may cause you to think more deeply about your role in your children's lives.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this interview will be kept confidential. The student researcher will transcribe the taped interviews. To ensure confidentiality neither the transcripts nor the audiotapes will contain any of your identifying information. Your name and the names of other members of your family will be changed. The transcripts, tapes, and contact information will be stored under lock and key. Only the student researcher and her major professor will have access to the securely stored data. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your personal identity will not be disclosed.

You have been told the interview will be taped. The recordings will be destroyed after the student researcher has finished transcribing the audio recordings.

Voluntary Participation:

Taking part in this interview is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question(s) you choose. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. Any data collected from you prior to withdrawal will not be included in the study results.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation available to participants.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please contact: Tisa Hill at (541) 231-9958 or [hillti@onid.orst.edu](mailto:hillti@onid.orst.edu) &/or Dr. Sheryl Thorburn at (541) 737-9493 or [Sheryl.Thorburn@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Sheryl.Thorburn@oregonstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact: Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 or [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

*Fathers' Perceptions of Their Impact on Children's Health and Well-being: An Exploratory Study*

Purpose:

I am interested in interviewing you about your life as a father. Through one-on-one interviews, I want to find out about your expectations of fatherhood, how these expectations changed after you became a father, who your role models were, and how you see yourself impacting your children's health.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will sign this form and we will continue with the interview. The interview will last for approximately 60 minutes and will be audio-taped.

Risks and Benefits:

This research involves no more than minimal risk to the participants. It is possible that our discussion may cause you to think more deeply about your role in your children's lives.

Confidentiality:

Your participation in this interview will be kept confidential. The student researcher will transcribe the taped interviews. To ensure confidentiality neither the transcripts nor the audiotapes will contain any of your identifying information. Your name and the names of other members of your family will be changed. The transcripts, tapes, and contact information will be stored under lock and key. Only the student researcher and her major professor will have access to the securely stored data. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your personal identity will not be disclosed.

By initialing in the space provided, you verify that you have been told the interview will be taped. The recordings will be destroyed after the student researcher has finished transcribing the audio recordings. \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's initials)

Voluntary Participation:

Taking part in this interview is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question(s) you choose. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. Any data collected from you prior to withdrawal will not be included in the study results.

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If you have any questions about this study, please contact: Tisa Hill at (541) 231-9958 or [hillti@onid.orst.edu](mailto:hillti@onid.orst.edu) &/or Dr. Sheryl Thorburn at (541) 737-9493 or [Sheryl.Thorburn@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Sheryl.Thorburn@oregonstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact: Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator at (541) 737-3437 or [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date