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An examination of intergenerational father involvement : does history determine destiny? : a project based upon an independent investigation

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Savann Donovan
An Examination of
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Determine Destiny?

ABSTRACT

This study used a pictorial assessment instrument, the Family Circles instrument, to determine (a) if there are generational differences in pictorial representations of father involvement, and (b) if participants tend to represent father involvement as similar between their family-of-origin and current family experiences. A subset of the California-based, longitudinal Supporting Father Involvement study, the sample consisted of 42 mothers and 50 fathers; 33 of the mothers and fathers were in a couple relationship with one another, sharing at least one child together. According to both mothers' and fathers' reports, fathers were depicted as more involved (i.e., more central in the family and closer to their children) in current nuclear families than were fathers in the family-of-origin. Fathers whose own fathers were involved during their childhood tend to see themselves as involved fathers, and those who did not experience involved fathers appear to work at correcting that pattern with their own children. The need for future studies to explore how and why mothers might encourage increased father involvement is discussed.

AN EXAMINATION OF INTERGENERATIONAL FATHER INVOLVEMENT:
DOES HISTORY DETERMINE DESTINY?

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is clear from prior research that the role fathers play in their children's lives is not secondary, but rather crucial. Studies within the last decade have highlighted the importance of fathers for children's well being, including their emotional (Lamb, 2002), psychological (Lamb, 2002; Palkovitz, 2002) and economic well-being and security (England & Folbre, 2002; Graham & Beller, 2002). Conversely, fathers' absence from families has repeatedly been associated with adverse effects on children including insufficient school achievement, decreased job involvement, having children at an earlier age and increased tendency to engage in risk-taking behavior (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998). Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan (1986) found that although effects of father absence are more detrimental and long term for sons, girls are also negatively impacted.

Although the overall number of single-father families remains relatively small, men account for one sixth of the country's 11.9 million single parents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). This number is showing a steady increase with single fathers rising from 1.7 million in 1995 to 2.1 million in 1998. Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, and Lamb (2000) note that these statistics speak to a societal shift which is becoming more supportive of paternal custody, fathers' greater inclination to try to attain custody rights and an increased penchant for both mothers and judges to endorse fathers' efforts

to do so. The nation has acknowledged the importance of promoting father involvement in more targeted ways as well. President Clinton in 1995 asked federal agencies to make a more concerted effort to promote father involvement by considering how some policies and programs might be reworked to help enhance fathers' involvement and to elucidate the important role fathers play in their children's lives (Shears, Summers, Boller, & Barclay-McLaughlin, 2006).

The Nurturing Father Initiative, which began in 1994, anticipated this call to action and began to review the way that research on fathers has been conducted since the 1960s. In finding that almost all of the research to date on fathers employed the middle class, relied on mothers' reports to formulate information about fathers and considered fathers' roles at only one particular point in time, the Initiative declared that it is necessary to conduct long-term studies on both married and non-married couples, as well as refine and improve data gathering regarding beliefs and feelings in relationships of all kinds related to child rearing (Shears et al., 2006). In addition, the U.S. Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 devoted one third of the \$150 million yearly budget for family support to specifically bolster programs aimed at promoting father involvement (Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). The goal of these initiatives was not to diminish the maternal role in any way, but to include paternal parenting in discussions about parenting styles and quality.

Research supports the notion that low father involvement is detrimental for children in a number of ways, including a higher probability that they will experience poverty, engage in law breaking behaviors, struggle with substance abuse and develop negative attitudes about authority figures (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and

Family Statistics, 1998; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985). Considering these potentially devastating effects, efforts to promote father involvement are crucial.

The current study draws upon tenets of family systems theory, specifically Minuchin's Structural Family Theory and Bowenian Theory, to help understand one way of approaching this challenging task. Minuchin's emphasis on family structure serves as the basis for measuring pictorial representations of father involvement through two structural variables: (a) fathers' centrality in the family, and (b) father-child closeness versus distance. Further, Bowen's concept of intergenerational transmission, the process by which familial attitudes and behaviors—including the structural position of family members—are repeated from one generation to the next, is considered to explore if father involvement is transmitted directly or modified from one generation to the next.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the often enduring effects of various childhood experiences, in particular one's degree of attachment with his or her caregiver(s) (Fraley, 2002; Van Ijzendoorn, Schuengl, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1999), past research has explored how relationships in the family-of-origin affect parenting in the adult nuclear family. Although researchers acknowledge that fathers who report having favorable relationships with their own fathers in the family-of-origin are more likely to display positive levels of involvement and attachment with their children (Reuter & Biller, 1973; Coysh, 1984; Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1996; Sagi, 1982), this does not mean that disengaged fathering in the family-of-origin is always associated with disengaged fathering in the adult nuclear family. Pleck (1997) points out that men make a decision to either emulate their father's level of involvement or to compensate for a lack of it when they themselves become fathers. Cowan & Cowan (1987), Parke (1995), and Sagi (1982) each found evidence which support the notion that men who experienced poorer relationships with their own fathers are commonly prone to "model positive fathering behaviors from a variety of sources, including peers and male characters portrayed in the media" (cited in Shears et al., 2006, p. 261).

Father involvement, however, has not always been defined consistently. This chapter begins by pointing out the multi-dimensional concept of father involvement that is largely embraced today. Next, I discuss studies highlighting the importance of father

involvement and suggest that certain sociohistorical changes in the last sixty years help explain statistics that reveal that father involvement in childrearing is steadily increasing in the United States. It is speculated that these changes, as well as adult children's desire to have a "corrective" (Alexander, French, Bacon, Benedek, Fuerst, Gerard, et al., 1946) experience in their nuclear families, may contribute to changes in fathers' structural positions in the family across generations. I then discuss pictorial/representational assessments that have been used in the past to explore what spatial positioning of real and representational family members can reveal about family functioning/family relationships. Because no pictorial/representational assessments in the past have been used to specifically examine changes in the intergenerational transmission of fathers' structural positions, the Family Circles instrument used in the present study may provide important information not yet explored.

Father Involvement Definitions in the Recent Past

The current expectation of what constitutes an optimal degree of father involvement represents a dramatic change in the United States over the last sixty years. Cabrera et al. (2000) argue that there are no unilateral, clearly defined activities/behaviors that define what constitutes "competent, supportive parenting for all men" (Cabrera et al., 2000, p. 132). One possible reason for this may be that the roles and responsibilities associated with parenthood have historically been less rigid and clearly defined for fathers than they have been for mothers. Despite this, popular ideas about fathers' roles in children's lives have historically viewed fathers as the part of the parent dyad that plays with the children (Redina & Dickerscied, 1976) and provides for their financial security,

while mothers assume responsibility for caregiving domains of children's lives. The current view of the parental system as a team of "co-parents" suggests that the allocation of rigid, gender-biased childrearing assignments is outdated and, instead, parenting responsibilities are to be embraced collectively and with a more egalitarian mindset (Feinberg, 2003).

Recent studies exploring what constitutes positive father involvement have found that both the quality and quantity of time fathers spend with their children are correlated with positive effects for children (Cabrera et al., 2000; Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009; Amato, 1998). However, it is important to note that quantity of time does not always correspond with quality of time. Levy-Shiff & Israelashvili (1988) found, for example, that although low-income fathers spend more time with their children than do fathers who are more financially secure, the involvement of less financially stable fathers was not as positive. Most likely reflecting an acknowledgement of such discrepancies and complications, Lamb et al. (1985, 1987) encouraged researchers to be mindful of the differences between fathers' *accessibility*, *engagement*, and *responsibility* because they each encompass distinct contributions fathers can make. While accessibility refers strictly to fathers' "presence and availability to the child" and does not consider the quality of interactions between father and child, engagement—on the other hand—considers the actual nature of the father's interactions and caregiving to the child (cited in Cabrera et al., 2000, p.129). Responsibility refers to fathers' involvement in helping with the everyday and systematic things that need to be done for children, such as speaking to teachers if there is a problem at school, making sure that children's health care

appointments are made and having input on the type of childcare children may receive (Lamb, 2000).

Although the dramatic increase in the number of families headed by females in the last fifty years (from 6% in 1960 to 24% in 1998, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999) does point to a decline in the traditional two-parent-per-household nuclear family, the concurrent finding that fathers are assuming a more central caregiving role signals increasing father involvement in children's lives (Cabrera, 2000). It is necessary to be aware of the distinction between low father involvement and father absence. Low father involvement refers to fathers that do have a relationship with their children, but this relationship is low in accessibility or engagement or responsibility, or any combination of these three aspects. Father absence, on the other hand, refers to fathers who do not play any role in their children's lives. Understanding this difference is especially important in light of the fact that, today, the majority of involved fathers are not parenting in the context of the traditional, married couple, but are instead involved with children as step-fathers, single fathers or nonresidential fathers (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Lamb, 2000; Snarey, 1993).

Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting Styles

Serbin & Karp (2003) note that one of the oldest postulations about the quality of parenting in families maintains that both the nature and quality of parenting are transmitted intergenerationally. This viewpoint reflects Bowen's intergenerational transmission theory (1978), which suggests that various aspects of individual development and characteristics are inherited from one generation to the next. Belsky,

Capaldi & Conger (2009a) note that empirical studies support the notion that both harsh parenting and high levels of family discord, as well as positive parenting, are passed from one generation to the next. Although different theoretical perspectives may suggest that alternative mechanisms are responsible for repetition of familial patterns, the fundamental belief in and acknowledgement of intergenerational transmission is evident in various theoretical perspectives including life course (Elder, 1981), attachment (Bowlby, 1969) and social learning (Bandura, 1977; Patterson, 1998) theories. Cabrera et al. (2000) point out that, historically, fathers have been granted more flexibility, compared to mothers, in terms of interpreting what their role and responsibilities are as a parent. In accordance with Cabrera's subsequent argument that it is therefore "especially important to consider the motivational bases of paternal involvement that are rooted in childhood," (p. 131) this section of the paper will focus on research supporting the intergenerational transmission of fathers' parenting styles and then briefly note empirical studies that explore potential mediating variables.

Many studies have recognized the potential for fathers' involvement with their children to be influenced by the nature of the relationship they had with their own fathers (Cowan & Cowan, 1987, 2000; Furstenberg & Weiss 2000; Hirschlein, Wyatt, & Plunkett, 2001; Sagi, 1982; Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, Lizotte, Krohn, & Smith, 2003). Compared to fathers who reported having negative relationships with their parents, fathers who reported having favorable relationships with their parents manifested more positive involvement and attachment with their own children (Reuter & Biller, 1973; Coysh, 1984; Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1996). For example, Hofferth (1999) found that, compared to men with absentee fathers or disengaged fathers, men who had

involved fathers themselves were more involved with their own children, as evidenced by assuming greater responsibility for their children, by monitoring them intently and by displaying more warmth. Similarly, Sagi (1982) conducted a study with middle class fathers in Israel and found that the relationship these fathers had with their own fathers was correlated with the participants' involvement with their children and how much satisfaction they reported as a parent.

Understanding factors that promote continuity or discontinuity of parenting styles is just as crucial as acknowledging that continuities or discontinuities exist. Research examining continuities in parenting from one generation to the next in a scientifically “rigorous” manner—such as research that is “prospective, longitudinal, and based on community samples”—had been lacking up until approximately ten years ago (Belsky, Capaldi, & Conger, 2009b, p. 1276). In 2009, *Developmental Psychology* published a special section on the topic of the intergenerational transmission of parenting styles. In five recent publications (Kovan, Chung, & Sroufe, 2009; Bailey, Hill, Oesterle, Hawkins, & the Social Development Research Group, 2009; Shaffer, Burt, Obradovic, Herbers, & Masten, 2009; Neppl, Conger, Scaramella, & Ontai, 2009; Kerr, Capaldi, Pears, & Owen, 2009) the continuity found to exist is “remarkably robust across different types of study populations, geographic locations, years between parenting assessments, and types of measures used” (Belsky et al., 2009b, p. 1278). The focus on *positive* parenting and its continuity or discontinuity seems to be a sign that researchers are recognizing the intergenerational transmission of parenting in a broader and more strengths-based way (Belsky et al., 2009b).

A major achievement of some of these recent studies is their efforts to identify developmental mediators that seem to be involved in the intergenerational transmission of parenting. Three of the studies (Kerr et al., 2009; Neppl et al., 2009; and Shaffer et al., 2009) found that adept social and/or school maturation was the key mediating mechanism of continuity between parenting styles. These findings suggest that it is the development of youths' competence during childhood and young adulthood that leads directly to emulating positive parenting behaviors. Although the way generation two was parented by generation one is obviously still important, these findings suggest that this relationship affects generation two's parenting indirectly.

Neppl et al. (2009) and earlier research by Caspi & Elder (1988) found that harsh parenting in one generation typically leads to a greater likelihood that the second generation will engage in antisocial behaviors. These behaviors in generation two are associated with harsh parenting of their children more so than their history of having been parented harshly themselves. In addition, Thornberry et al. (2003) found that poverty in childhood forecasts financial difficulty for adult children, and that financial difficulty impacted parenting styles in both the families-of-origin and nuclear families. Accordingly, harsh parenting in one generation leads indirectly to harsh parenting in the next generation through the inheritance of financial stress/poverty. Additionally, as Belsky et al. (2009b) note, low socioeconomic status is correlated with having children at an earlier age. In turn, having children at an earlier age is correlated with harsher parenting. These findings contribute important suggestions about the complexities of intergenerational transmission and expose the necessity of taking into consideration a broad host of variables that may affect parenting behavior.

Sociohistorical Trends Toward Increased Father Involvement

Pleck & Pleck (1997) argue that at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the United States has “seen an evolution of father ideals from the colonial father, to the distant breadwinner, to the modern involved dad, to the father as co-parent” (cited in Cabrera et al., 2000, p. 127). The authors credit major social trends that account for these changes in definitions of father involvement, including increased female employment, increased father involvement and increased cultural diversity. The beginning of these noted changes can be traced back to the women’s movement which began in the late 1960’s. This movement is associated with major changes in the—“traditional female gender-role”—and because men and women’s roles are contingent upon one another, conceptions about the traditional role that men should play also began to be reexamined and modified (Jordan, 1995). Belsky et al. (2009b) state the importance of taking into consideration societal changes which are likely to impact views on what constitutes appropriate versus inappropriate parenting. These changes also help explain why the United States is seeing an increase in family structures that deviate from the traditional family structure headed by two married parents and why there are, subsequently, new notions about what role fathers should play in their children’s lives.

In response to *Developmental Psychology’s* 1998 special edition on the intergenerational transmission of parenting, both Rutter (1998) and Patterson (1998) acknowledge that continuities in parenting may be impacted by the social climate and idiosyncratic qualities of the individual just as much, and potentially more, than they are impacted by experiences in the family-of-origin. Belsky et al. (2009b) persuasively build a case for why the noted social trends changed the nature of father involvement and

family life. For example, as the United States continues to experience extremely large immigration rates, changes in ethnicity and cultural diversity result in different ways of viewing the appropriate roles of mothers and fathers (Cabrera et al., 2000). The following discussion focuses on two of these trends: women's increased participation in the workforce and fathers' increased involvement with their children. The National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW) (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2009) is conducted every five years by the Families and Work Institute and provides an unprecedented longitudinal examination of the United States workforce. The study's 2008 findings comprise most of the statistical trends noted in the following discussion.

NSCW's 2008 findings indicate that in 1950, only 40% of women eighteen and older worked while approximately 82% of men eighteen and older worked. In 2007, however, this measure for men and women was nearing equivalency with 57% of women and 66% of men eighteen and older working. The interaction of a number of complex sociohistorical trends—including women attaining higher educational degrees for approximately the last thirty years, men's increased likelihood in the past four years to be working reduced hours (under thirty-five hours a week) and the current recession's greater impact on men—are all likely to help explain why it is possible that women today may actually comprise more of the wage and salaried positions than men. Women's equal if not dominating role in the workforce is reflected by both men and women, but particularly men's, changing opinions about working mothers' ability to have an equally positive relationship with her children as compared to mothers who do not work (NSCW, 2008). Researchers have argued that as wage discrepancies continue to lessen and women

continue to earn a similar amount to their partners, father involvement in childcare is likely to increase (Brayfield, 1995; Casper & O'Connell, 1998).

With women's increased participation in the workforce, there has been a concurrent increase in men assuming broader caregiving roles—roles which reflect a more sharing and gender neutral attitude regarding childcare. NSCW's 2008 finding that there is no longer any statistical difference between men and women's notions of appropriate gendered work and family roles illustrates this sociohistoric change. When considering that mainstream society no longer views the responsibility of childcare as the mother's sole responsibility, it makes sense that fathers today are spending significantly more time with their children compared to three decades ago (NSCW, 2008). Fathers' experience in their families-of-origin, specifically childhood experiences with caretaking (i.e. babysitting) and progressive gender socialization (including execution of chores that do not strictly adhere to stereotyped gender assignments, such as cleaning the bathroom or vacuuming) have been found to increase the likelihood that men will be more involved fathers (Gerson, 1993; Pleck, 1997). Hoeffferth (1998) found that compared to fathers with "old-fashioned" ideas about childcare, fathers who embrace more egalitarian ideas about gender roles typically tend to be "more active, responsible, and warm, and to monitor their children's behavior more than those with less gender-equitable values" (cited in Cabrera et al., 2000, p. 131).

Although mothers typically do continue to spend more time with their children with a steady average of 3.8 hours per workday (a statistic which has remained constant since 1977), this gap appears to be steadily closing. Between 1977 and 2008, fathers with children under thirteen increased the average amount of time they spent with their

children per workday by one hour, growing from two to three hours per day. Moreover, it was found that although both young parents (under 29) and older parents (29 to 42) have on average begun spending more time with their children on workdays, the increase has been most dramatic for fathers under the age of 29. In 1977, this cohort was found to average 3.1 hours per week, but by 2008 this number had risen to 4.3 hours. Both men and women confirm that fathers' childcare responsibilities have increased: compared with 58% in 1992, only 48% of men in 2008 report that their wives or partners assume the most responsibility for childcare. Furthermore, compared to 21 % in 1992, 31% of mothers in 2008 report that their spouse takes or shares the responsibility (NSCW, 2008). Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hoeffferth (1998) note that, in the past, fathers in married families spent only around 30% to 45% the amount of time with their children as do mothers, but more recently they have been found on weekdays to spend 67% and weekends 87% as much time as mothers. Casper (1997) and Presser (1995) point out that increased flexibility in work schedules, including irregular work schedules, part-time employment, job sharing and home-based work, all play a role in fathers' increased involvement with their children.

Maternal Gatekeeping & Other Important Influences on Father Involvement

One influence on father involvement among families with young children, like the families in this study, is maternal gatekeeping. Maternal gatekeeping most commonly refers to attitudes and behaviors by mothers that constrict father involvement and shared childrearing responsibilities between their children's fathers and themselves. As Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling (2007) point out, the term "gatekeeping" serves a metaphoric purpose

as it suggests how one parent may act as the gatekeeper to the other parent's access to parental authority and involvement. While it is possible for either mother or father to function in the role of gatekeeper, theory and research have both directed most attention to the ways that mothers restrict father involvement by assuming, for example, the larger share of childcare responsibility and by intentionally or inadvertently discouraging or criticizing fathers' attempts to be more involved in childcare (Pruett et al., 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, & Mangelsdorf, 2008; Coltrane, 1996; Lamb, 1997).

Gaunt (2008) suggests three antecedents of maternal gatekeeping: the desire to maintain power and self-esteem by dominating in the home sphere perhaps because women are deprived of different sources of power elsewhere (Coltrane, 1996; Lamb 1997; and LaRossa, 1997), the desire to affirm the gendered self by engaging in stereotypically "female" activities or the desire to validate maternal identity (Ferree, 1991; Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991; Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Some research suggests that mothers' desire and expectations for father involvement may be a stronger determinant of father involvement than fathers' own ideas about what constitutes positive involvement (McBride, Brown, Bost, Shin, Vaughn, & Korth, 2005). Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008) found that only when mothers engaged in low levels of criticism did the beliefs fathers reported about their paternal role reflect their actual degree of involvement. The authors reason that the association between fathers' self-reported beliefs about the importance of father involvement may have been "blocked" as a result of mothers' criticizing the fathers (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008, p. 396). Similarly, McBride et al. (2005) found that mother's opinions about the importance of the father's role directly

impacted how involved fathers (even those perceiving themselves as highly involved) actually behave with their children.

However, Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008), in noting that a purpose of maternal gatekeeping is to govern fathers' involvement, make a crucial point when they argue that "it is important that we conceptualize gatekeeping more broadly, as consisting of both inhibitory and facilitative behaviors engaged in by mothers with the goal of regulating father behavior" (p. 390). Although less commonly acknowledged, some researchers have explored how mothers may behave in ways that endorse father involvement. Roy & Dyson (2005) found, for example, that 75% of their sample of incarcerated men in a work release program reported instances when their children's mothers encouraged their involvement. Considering that mothers' facilitative maternal gatekeeping behaviors in this study often required more concerted efforts on the mothers' behalf due to the fathers' highly restricted lifestyles, this example illustrates especially well the potential for mothers to facilitate father involvement. Pruett et al. (2007) also described the types of facilitative maternal gatekeeping behaviors divorced mothers and fathers of young children reported, noting that fathers reported fewer types and instances than did mothers, but they agreed that mothers engaged in some such facilitation.

The possible motivations for inhibitive maternal gatekeeping may in part be due to historical trends of gender socialization which have traditionally provided men with a less clearly defined blueprint of what their parental role should consist of compared to women. As a result, women commonly view their role as mother as integral to their identity (Pruett et al., 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). Many men, as a result, have come to view women "as innately or instinctively superior parents" (Jordan, 1995, p. 62).

Consequently, men's conception of what constitutes their parental role, and therefore their degree of paternal involvement, may be more dependent upon and determined by the quality of the co-parental relationship than has the mother-child relationship (Belsky & Volling, 1987; Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989; Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983; Levy-Shiff & Israelashvili, 1988; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Feinberg, 2003). As Bandura (1977) proposed, a person's perceptions of self-efficacy influence his or her behavior: people who believe they have the ability to make a valued outcome happen (i.e., being a good father) are more likely to invest themselves in the process necessary to achieve that outcome. Considering that some fathers look to mothers for how they should behave in the parental role, maternal gatekeeping may either boost fathers' confidence in their ability to parent well or desecrate this confidence.

Far fewer studies have examined why mothers engage in facilitative maternal gatekeeping. What specific motivations lead mothers to encourage high levels of father involvement? Barnett & Baruch (1987) found that in families where both the mother and father work, wives' schedule demands and usually more liberal gender role attitudes were correlated with fathers' increased participation. In families where the father was the only parent working, however, the fathers' beliefs about the fathering they received in the family-of-origin was the most frequent predictor of father involvement. Barnett & Baruch (1987) suggest that this finding is most likely largely due to fathers in dual-earner families having less freedom to determine their level of involvement with their children as a result of their wives' participation in the workforce. It may be argued, however, that in light of research findings that mothers influence the degree of fathers' involvement,

these working mothers engage in facilitative maternal gatekeeping by communicating to their husbands/partners that they approve of/appreciate their contributions in childrearing.

Walker & McGraw (2000) caution that the conception of mothers as gatekeepers unfairly implicates mothers as responsible for low father involvement, despite the fact that researchers have advanced the argument that father involvement is also strongly impacted by the father's motivation and personality (Bonney, Kelly, & Levant, 1999; Nangle, Kelley, Fals-Stewart, & Levant, 2003). While there seems to be little question that maternal gatekeeping does occur to various extents in some families, it is important to note that extreme instances of inhibitive maternal gatekeeping in which the father is outcast from the realm of the crib are relatively infrequent. More typically, co-parental relationships are marked by parents' egalitarian notions about childcare and parents' efforts to be mutually supportive of one another's contributions (Feinberg, 2003). Cabrera et al. (2000) point out that the fundamental essence of a co-parental relationship symbolizes a major societal change as it eradicates the assignment of marital responsibilities, including both domestic and financial responsibilities, based on gender. This change, they reason, is likely to result in mothers acting as inhibitive gatekeepers less frequently.

Pictorial/Representational Instruments for Assessing the Family

Pictorial/representational instruments designed to explore family functioning vary in regard to the tasks families are asked to engage in and the type of variables used to assess functioning. Techniques range from the genogram (Bowen, 1978) to the Kinetic Family Drawing (Burns & Kaufman, 1970) or Conjoint Family Drawing (Bing, 1970) to

symbolic figure placement techniques (SFPTs). These instruments, however, all share the fundamental acknowledgment that the space family members assign to separate themselves from one another symbolically represents how close or distant they feel towards one another. Indeed, the idea that spatial positions in families are telling of various aspects of familial relations is not new. Kantor and Lehr (1975) recognize space, in addition to time and energy, as one of the major components impacting family functioning. Minuchin's (1974) conception of different family configurations is dependent upon characterizing them on a spectrum ranging from close (cohesive) to distant (divided). Although pictorial instruments, to varying extents, recognize spatial distance between family members as an important indicator of emotional closeness, the following discussion highlights the particular relevance of the Family Circles instrument in regard to exploring the intergenerational transmission of fathers' structural positions.

Genograms. Genograms are diagrams that use symbols, lines, and written labels to depict information about the nuclear and extended families, typically over three generations. The information that can be gathered using genograms is extensive. In addition to potentially accessing demographic data and information about major life occurrences such as births, deaths, marriages and divorces, genograms can also convey data related to family illnesses, traditions and rituals and the quality of family relationships (as represented, for instance, by enmeshment or alliances between family members) (Weber & Levine, 1995). Genograms can additionally be tailored to examine and depict intergenerational processes. The Sexual Genogram (Berman & Hof, 1987; Hof & Berman, 1986), culturagrams (Congress, 1994), The Gendergram (White & Tyson-Rawson, 1995) and the Spiritual Genogram (Frame, 2000) each examine unique domains

of life and may reveal intergenerational continuities or discontinuities. The genogram is also effective as a projective measure (Watchtel, 1982; Kaslow, 1995) because it can act “as a map to the unconscious with information remembered and revealed by the client reflective of core internal conflicts” (Timm & Blow, 2005, p. 176).

However, although early inconsistencies in recording family information were addressed by a committee in the 1980s and a standardized method for recording family data was subsequently developed (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985), this method remains largely unknown by the general population. Accordingly, genograms are most commonly used as a collaborative technique between therapist and patient and are generally not completed by clients independently. The reliance on verbal communication in completing a genogram may be viewed as a limitation of the technique. In addition, genograms rely instead on their own specific coding system which is not known in the general population. To denote a disengaged, estranged father in a genogram, for example, it is not his spatial placement that matters but rather the use of a red dashed line that stops before connecting this father with other family members that denotes emotional cutoff.

Drawing Assessments. Family assessments which involve the creation of a drawing, including The Kinetic Family Drawing (KFD) and the Conjoint Family Drawing, have been found by many art therapists (Naumberg, 1966; Levick & Herring, 1973; Tokuda, 1973) to be especially effective at helping clients/participants elude the difficulties of verbal communication and repression. Some of these therapists have also reported that when clients speak about their art, they speak more openly and honestly than they normally would. Naumberg (1966) suggested that this occurs because clients

view their art as separate from themselves and this separation consequently enables them to feel less vulnerable or threatened than they may feel through direct disclosure.

Although many researchers have found the KFD to be a valuable and culturally sensitive instrument, others question its reliability in this regard. For example, Handler and Habenicht (1994) found the KFD to be a valid tool for investigating the effects of normal and dysfunctional family relations in different cultural groups. Magnum (1976) and Walton (1983) found the instrument to be relevant to African American, Hispanic and White children. Wegmann and Lusebrink (2000), however, found statistically significant differences among the drawings of children ages seven to ten from the United States, Taiwan and Switzerland. Although the variable pertaining to the distance between family figures was found to be reliable, the majority of other variables examined—including representations of incomplete bodies, sexual differentiation and compartmentalization—were not found to be reliable. This finding draws attention to the fact that drawing assessments require that clinicians working with children from diverse backgrounds (and who may potentially speak different languages) be keenly aware of nuances in drawings related to cultural differences. Failure to evaluate drawings in a culturally sensitive way could result in making inaccurate interpretations. Consider, for example, the clinician who may assume that the lack of smiles in a Japanese child's drawing attest to this child's depression or conflicted family relationships. Although this may be true, it is also essential to take into consideration that while the United States typically values outward expression of emotions, Japanese culture values the restraint of emotions in public (Esquivel, Oades-Sese, & Littman Olitzky, 2008).

The Conjoint Family Drawing asks families to collectively engage in creating a drawing that represents how they currently see themselves as a family on one large sheet of paper. Although a number of art therapists have learned a great deal about family dynamics by observing the way the family interacts around a shared task (Bing, 1970; Geddes & Medway, 1977; Kwiatkowska, 1978; Rubin, 1978), family members may not feel free to express or portray how they truly feel about family members when those members are present. While it has already been noted that artistic assessments have been found to elicit people's primal emotions, it seems probable that the presence of other family members would make people more self-conscious.

Symbolic figure placement techniques (SFPT). SFPTs broadly refer to tasks which ask family members to arrange figurines, dolls, or other tangible objects in order to represent the distance that exists between members (Gehring & Schultheiss, 1987). The Kvebaek Family Structure Technique (KFST) (Kvebaek, Cromwell, & Fournier, 1980) is an example of a symbolic figure placement technique that provides an in-depth measure of family structure. The KFST requires family members, individually and then as a group, to place wooden figurines on a board that looks similar to a chess board in regard to how they actually view spatial distance, specifically cohesion, between family members and then again in regard to how they "ideally" would like those relationships to be spatially represented. Discrepancies between actual and ideal spatial placements are interpreted as symbolic of how much or how little family members desire to modify their relationships (Kohlhepp, 1998).

Solem and Novic (1995) administered a questionnaire to 28 families with an inpatient adolescent family member and 35 families with an adolescent participating in an

epidemiological study of mental health. Although most families in both samples confirmed that the KFST accurately depicted family functioning, the finding that 15.2% of clinical participants and 22.8% of epidemiological participants reported that they may have sculpted or placed figures differently in a private setting, suggests that the KFST technique may render different results in different circumstances. Like the Conjoint Family Drawing, one explanation for this finding may be that some family members are inhibited because they do not want to publically reveal their feelings about one another. While the KFST's ability to serve as a pre- and post-assessment tool (Berry, Hurley, & Worthington, 1990) and to explore complicated family interactions is valuable, the traditional use of the instrument does not provide information about continuities and discontinuities in intergenerational relationships.

Other symbolic figure placement techniques, including the Family Hierarchy Test (Madanes, 1978) and the Family Distance Doll Placement Technique (FDDPT) (Gerber & Kaswan, 1971), also elucidate important information about family functioning, but also do not address issues pertaining to the intergenerational transmission of specific family members' structural positions across generations. The Family Hierarchy Test evaluates cross-generational boundaries by examining family members' spatial positions. Family members, both individually and as a group, are asked to decide which one of eight charts "with distinct hierarchical family structures illustrated by the arrangement of four stick figures" (Kohlhepp, 1998, p. 87) most closely represents their family's structure. This technique is especially helpful at identifying instances of boundary violations, such as triangulation. The FDDTP asks family members to arrange dolls on a board to represent how close or distant family members feel towards one another during negative and

positive family events. While these techniques are most appropriate with certain therapeutic assessment goals, they are not best suited with the current objective of examining changes in the fathers' structural positions across generations.

The Family Circles Instrument. The Family Circles instrument used in the present study is based on one developed by Cooper, Holman, and Braithwaite (1983) and asks participants to pictorially represent relationships with family members in both their family-of-origin and current nuclear family. SFPTs and the Family Circles instrument are most similar due to the fact that their assessment relies exclusively on spatial representation. For this reason, it may be argued that they make the purest attempt to achieve the original goal of family sculpting techniques (Satir, 1972; Duhl, Kantor, & Duhl, 1973; Papp, Silverstein, & Carter, 1973) to “translate systems theory into physical form through spatial arrangements” (Kohlhepp, 1998, p. 75). Although the Family Circles instrument shares SFPTs ability to gather information about how all family members relate to one another, one of its primary strengths lies in its ability to assess whether structural positions in the family are intergenerationally transmitted or if there is a discontinuity from one generation to the next. None of the other assessment techniques are tailored to examine this intergenerational correlation and, because they rely on figures/objects being physically placed (e.g. dolls), they do not offer a permanent record, as that offered by the Family Circles instrument.

In addition, the Family Circles instrument relies on participants' own perceptions of how their family functions as a system rather than assessments (i.e., TAT cards and Rorschach blots adapted and then administered to each family member as seen in Mendell & Fisher, 1958; Kadushin, Waxenberg, & Sager, 1971) which require the

administrator to interpret what is revealed or suggested about the family's functioning. In regard to accessing information about the complexities of intergenerational relationships, the Family Circles instrument is especially effective because in addition to allowing participants to depict qualities of family boundaries, it also enables both the participant and researcher to determine if the current paternal place in the family and parent-child relationship reflect an intergenerational continuity or perhaps a concerted effort on the participant's behalf to foster a "corrective" (Alexander et al., 1946) experience that differs from how their father interacted. Another strength of the Family Circles instrument is that it enables people to represent their perceived emotional connection with family members through spatial placements without requiring participants to depict family relationships, a task which may feel uncomfortable or potentially emotionally upsetting to some family member, in front of each other.

The Present Study

As part of a larger ongoing research and intervention project in California—the Supporting Father Involvement study (SFI; Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009)—various kinds of data regarding father involvement and co-parenting were collected. As one aspect of the larger study, mothers and fathers were asked to pictorially represent relationships with family members in both their family-of-origin and current nuclear family using the Family Circles instrument—again, an adaptation of the pictorial instrument developed by Cooper, Holman, and Braithwaite (1983). In the present study, we asked two questions: Question 1) Are there generational differences in pictorial representations of father involvement as indicated by (A) centrality (versus peripheral

placement) of father's position; and (B) closeness (versus distance) between father and child? Question 2) Is there an association between each participant's family-of-origin and current family pictorial representations of father involvement as also indicated by structural variables "A" and "B" listed above?

Four guiding hypotheses were developed for this study; 1 and 2 pertain to Question 1 while hypotheses 3 and 4 pertain to Question 2.

- 1) Fathers will be more central in the participants' current nuclear family;
- 2) Father-child relationships will be closer in the current nuclear family;
- 3) Participants with involved fathers in the family-of-origin will be more likely to depict themselves (or for women, to depict their partners) as engaged in the current nuclear family, and;
- 4) Participants with disengaged fathers in the family-of-origin will also be more likely to depict themselves (or for women, to depict their partners) as involved in the current nuclear family.

Thus, it is predicted that for participants who had involved fathers, there will be a match between family-of-origin and current nuclear family patterns of paternal centrality and involvement. For participants who had disengaged fathers, there will be a mismatch between the two sets of family depictions. It is therefore expected that current fathers will be more involved. More involved fathering in the present family circles may be achieved either by fathers making an effort to be different from their own fathers or by mothers promoting their partners to be involved fathers. Accordingly, involved fathering in the current families is expected to occur regardless of whether fathers in the families-of-origin were close or peripheral to participating fathers and mothers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The larger SFI study, from which the current study is derived, is a randomized clinical trial comparing two variations of a preventive intervention focused on the importance of fathers to their children's development and well-being. A sample of predominantly low-income families—two thirds Mexican American and one third European American—were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a 16-week intervention group for fathers, a 16-week intervention group for couples or a low-dose comparison condition in which both parents attended one 3-hour group session.

The SFI study and staff were located within Family Resource Centers in four California counties (San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Tulare, and Yuba) in communities that are primarily rural, agricultural, and low-income and which have high proportions of Mexican American residents. At each site, some participants were recruited by project staff through direct referrals from within the Family Resource Centers, while most participants were recruited “from other county service agencies, talks at community organizational meetings, ads in the local media, local family fun days, and information tables placed strategically at sports events, malls and other community public events where fathers were in attendance” (Cowan et al., 2009, p. 666). The project sought to enlist parents expecting a child and those with a youngest child seven and younger.

Case managers then administered a short screening interview which assessed if parents met four additional criteria: (a) both partners agreed to participate; (b) regardless

of whether they were married, cohabitating or living separately, the partners were biological parents of their youngest child and raising the child together; (c) neither the mother or the father struggled with a mental illness or drug or alcohol abuse problem that thwarted their daily functioning at work or caring for their child(ren); (d) no current open cases with Child Protective Services, including both child and spousal cases and no instance of spousal violence or child abuse within the last year. The purpose of this last criterion was designed to bar participants who may amplify the risks for child abuse or neglect should they increase participation in daily family life.

Screening interviews were administered to 550 couples; 496 (90.2%) of these couples met the criteria for eligibility. Of these eligible couples, 371 completed the initial interview, agreed to accept random assignment to one of the three conditions, and completed the baseline assessments.

The single meetings of the low-dose comparison group and the 16-week fathers' and couples' groups began after baseline assessments were finished. The fathers' and couples' groups met for 2 hours each week for 16 weeks and involved both a fixed curriculum of exercises, discussions, and short presentations and an unrestricted time in which participants discussed with one another real-life issues and concerns that they face. The curriculum was adapted by Marsha Kline Pruett and Rachel Ebling from an earlier curriculum developed by Phil and Carolyn Cowan (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Cowan, Cowan, & Heming, 2005).

Sample

The current sample is a subset of the SFI's larger sample. The present sample includes 42 mothers and 50 fathers; 33 of the mothers and fathers are in a couple

relationship with one another, sharing at least one child together. The sample is 57.6% non-Hispanic white, 35.6% Latino/Hispanic, and 6.8% mixed ethnicity.

Procedures

Family Circles is one of the many instruments used in the SFI and was an optional instrument. Project group leaders exercised their discretion to either use or not use the Family Circles instrument during one of their group meetings. This method of obtaining participants most closely reflects that of convenience sampling because administering the instrument was nonobligatory and a decision made by each project group leader. When the instrument was used, it was used during a group meeting that focused on intergenerational issues with regard to parenting/fathering.

The Family Circles instrument used in the current study was adapted from the *Family Cohesion Index* developed by Cooper, Holman, and Braithwaite (1983) for a study which explored the connection between children's self-esteem and their perception of family cohesion. The adapted Family Circles instrument for this study (Appendix A) consists of two pages and is easy to administer because it does not require any provisions other than a pen or pencil to complete. Page one pertains to family structure in the family-of-origin; page two pertains to family structure in the current nuclear family. Instructions explain that any family may contain some members who are particularly close to one another while other members are more distant or separate from one another. Four sample circles are presented, which show different family types/configurations for a three person family. It is explicitly stated that "the space between the circles represents the closeness or distance of the relationship between them."

The directions for the first drawing ask participants to draw a picture that they believe to be most like their family growing up and which includes all family members—themselves as a child, their parents, their siblings, and anyone else (i.e., extended family members considered to be part of the more immediate family). Similarly, the directions for the second drawing ask participants to draw a picture that is most like their current family and which includes all family members—themselves (now a parent), their partner, and their child/children. Both directions explain that a circle should be added for each person in their family and participants are asked to write each person's name either inside or beside the designated circle.

A number of variables related to family relations were coded using the Family Circles instrument, including the basic family structure (i.e., cohesive, divided, isolated child, parent coalition, or triangulated); the shortest and longest distance between siblings; and the distance between mother and father (if, that is, both were/are present). The present study, however, focuses on two coded variables: (1) the placement of the father in each circle and (2) the distance between the father and the target child in each circle. The target child was the youngest child in the family, and all participating families had children seven years or younger. The placement of the father was coded as one of four graded positions: 1 = *Center*; 2 = *Inside the Circle, but neither in the center nor periphery*; 3 = *On/Near Periphery*; 4 = *Outside or Not Present*. In determining the distance between a father and the target child, the shortest distance between their two individual circles was measured; this was done by measuring the edges of the circles that were closest to one another. There are five available codes for this variable: 1 =

Overlapping; 2 = Touching; 3 = Less than 2 cm apart; 4 = 2-5 cm apart; 5 = Greater than 5 cm apart. Indeterminable codes were treated as missing data.

In order to code both of the variables reliably, a set of coding guidelines was developed. For example, fathers' placement in the circle was coded as "On/Near Periphery" if their individual circles were drawn within 5 mm of the periphery. If a father's individual circle crossed the periphery of the family circle but less than 50% of his circle was drawn outside, he was coded as "On/Near Periphery." Conversely, fathers were coded as "Outside or Not Present" if 51-100% of their individual circle was drawn outside the periphery of the large family circle.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Generational Differences in Representations of Father's Centrality

Hypothesis 1 examines whether there are *generational differences* in pictorial representations of *centrality of father's position* in the family circle. Analyses indicate that A) there was a dramatic increase in the number of fathers depicted in the center of the current family circles (71%), compared to family-of-origin circles (12%). At the same time, there was a dramatic decrease in the number of fathers depicted on/near periphery from family-of-origin (35%) to current family (9%). There was also a dramatic decrease in the number of fathers depicted outside the circle from family-of-origin (35%) to current family (7%). Examining fathers' placement as a continuous variable (i.e., radial distance from the center of the circle), there is a significant difference between family-of-origin circles and current family circles both in the mothers' data and in the fathers' data: mothers' $t = 6.7, p < .001$; fathers' $t = 8.3, p < .001$. Both mothers and fathers perceived their fathers to be less central (and more peripheral) to the family when growing up, compared to perceptions of the father's role in their current nuclear family.

Generational Differences in Representations of Father-Child Closeness

Hypothesis 2 examines whether there are generational differences in pictorial representations of *closeness between father and child* in the family circle. In family-of-origin circles, the father-child relationship (i.e., between the respondent and his/her

father, during respondent's childhood) is most frequently depicted as 2-5 cm apart (42%). However, in current family circles, the father-child relationship (i.e., between father and target child) is most frequently depicted as touching (49%). Examining distance between father and child as a continuous variable, there is a significant difference between family-of-origin circles and current family circles both in the mothers' data and in the fathers' data: mothers' $t = 4.5$, $p < .001$; fathers' $t = 5.6$, $p < .001$. Both mothers and fathers perceived their own childhood relationship to their father as more distant (or less close), compared to perceptions of their own relationship (or, for women, their partner's relationship) to their child currently.

In summary, results pertaining to the first question of the present study show that fathers depicted themselves as more central and as closer to their child than were their fathers. There was a generational shift in the direction of increased father involvement, according to both mothers' and fathers' reports.

Associations between Family-of-Origin and Current Family Representations of Father's Centrality

The second question seeks to determine whether the relationship between family-of-origin and current nuclear family pictorial representations of father involvement depends on the level of father involvement in the family-of-origin. More specifically, if participants' fathers were more involved in the family-of-origin, are participants more likely to replicate this pattern in their current family (Hypothesis 3)? If participants' fathers were disengaged in the family-of-origin, are participants less likely to replicate

this pattern in their current family (Hypothesis 4)? These two hypotheses are tested concurrently in the following analyses.

First, to examine fathers' centrality, father's placement in the family was dichotomized into two categories: center/inside circle versus peripheral/outside circle. Using Pearson's chi-square test, these categories were compared in terms of the number of matches between family-of-origin and current nuclear family depictions. The distributions of matches versus non-matches were significantly different for the two categories; $\chi^2(1, N=90) = 41.68; p < .001$. Participants who depicted their own fathers as more central to the family while growing up were far more likely to depict father's placement as *similar* in their current families (24 out of 26, or 92%). But participants who experienced their own fathers as more peripheral/absent while growing up were far more likely to depict father's placement as *dissimilar* in their current families (52 out of 64, or 81%).

Table 1: Match Between Family-of-Origin (FOO) and Current Nuclear Family in Centrality of Father's Position

	YES	NO	
father more central in FOO	24	2	26
father more peripheral in FOO	12	52	64
	36	54	90

When mothers' and fathers' data were analyzed separately, both Pearson chi-square tests showed a significant difference in distributions of matches versus non-matches: mothers' $\chi^2(1, N=42) = 14.11; p < .001$; fathers' $\chi^2(1, N=48) = 27.14; p < .001$.

Associations between Family-of-Origin and Current Family Representations of Father-Child Closeness

Second, father-child closeness was dichotomized into two categories: 0-2 cm apart versus over 2 cm apart. Using Pearson's chi-square test, these categories were compared in terms of the number of matches between family-of-origin and current nuclear family depictions. The distributions of matches versus non-matches were significantly different for the two categories, $\chi^2(1, N=53) = 29.68; p < .001$. Participants who experienced very close relationships with their own fathers while growing up were far more likely to depict father-child relationships as *similar* in their current families (20 out of 21, or 95%). But participants who experienced more distant relationships with their own fathers while growing up were far more likely to depict father-child relationships as *dissimilar* in their current families (26 out of 32, or 81%).

Table 2: Match between Family-of-Origin (FOO) and Current Nuclear Family in Father-Child Closeness

	YES	NO	
father-child touching in FOO	20	1	21
father-child separated in FOO	6	26	32
	26	27	53

When mothers' and fathers' data were analyzed separately, both Pearson chi-square tests showed a significant difference in distributions of matches versus non-matches: mothers' $\chi^2(1, N=21) = 8.24; p < .01$; fathers' $\chi^2(1, N=32) = 21.90; p < .001$.

In summary, men who had involved fathers were far more likely to depict themselves as central and close to their child. Fathers who had disengaged fathers (i.e., fathers who were more peripheral and less close to their child) were far more likely to depict themselves as dissimilar from their own fathers. Those who had involved fathers tended to follow in their footsteps, and those who did not have involved fathers worked at correcting that pattern with their own children. This held true according to mothers' and fathers' reports.

CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION

Using the adapted Family Circles instrument, this study asked both mothers and fathers to pictorially depict familial relationships both in their families-of-origin (in which they were children) and in their current nuclear families (in which they are now parents of young children). Two questions were asked. The first question sought to determine if there are generational differences in mothers' and fathers' pictorial representations of father involvement as indicated by (A) centrality of the father's position in the family circle, and (B) closeness between father and child in the family circle between family-of-origin and current nuclear family. The findings from the first question indicate that there are statistically significant generational differences in pictorial representations of father involvement both in terms of how central fathers are and how close fathers are to children.

In terms of centrality, 71% of participating fathers were depicted in the center of the current family circles, as compared with only 12% of fathers in the family-of-origin family circles. Accordingly, fathers in current nuclear families occupied a less peripheral or absent role: only 9% of fathers in the current families were depicted on/near periphery compared to 35% of fathers in the family-of-origin family circles. In terms of father-child closeness, the majority of participating fathers (49%) were depicted as touching the target child. Father-child relationships in the family-of-origin, in contrast, were most commonly represented (42%) as more distant, operationalized in this study as 2-5 cm apart. These

findings held for women's representations of their partner as well as men's representations of themselves.

These findings indicate that participants perceived their own childhood relationship to their fathers as more distant (or less close) compared to perceptions of their own relationship (or, for women, their partner's relationship) to their child currently. This finding is consistent with the 2008 statistics regarding increased father involvement reported by the National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW). NSCW suggests that major sociohistorical changes in the last thirty years—including women's increased earning of higher educational degrees and increased participation in the workforce, as well as men's increased likelihood to work fewer hours—have all contributed to men assuming a more active role in various aspects of childcare. In fact, the difference between men's and women's notions of appropriate gendered work and family roles was statistically insignificant according to a NSCW 2008 report. Traditional, rigid gender roles (i.e., mother exclusively as stay at home caregiver and father exclusively and primarily as breadwinner) are no longer representative of mainstream society. The distribution of marital responsibilities by traditional gender roles does not reflect the modern concept of parenting, often referred to as the co-parental relationship, as a shared responsibility that is meant to be embraced collectively and with an egalitarian mindset (Feinberg, 2003). The current study's findings that fathers have become more central in the family and closer to their children reflect this modern conceptualization of father involvement.

The second question sought to determine whether the relationship between family-of-origin and current nuclear family pictorial representations of father

involvement depend on the level of father involvement in the family-of-origin. It was found that current fathering does largely depend on the fathering one received in the family-of-origin. When participants had involved fathers in the family-of-origin, they almost always depicted current fathers' involvement as similar to their fathers (only two current fathers were depicted as not matching involved fathering). Conversely, when participants' fathers were disengaged in the family-of-origin, they almost always depicted current fathers' involvement as dissimilar to their fathers.

This finding supports previous research that suggests that fathers who had involved fathers in the family-of-origin, more so than fathers who experienced disengaged fathering during childhood, are likely to emulate this involved fathering when they themselves become fathers (Reuter & Biller, 1973; Coysh, 1984; Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1996; Sagi, 1982). Another implication of these findings is that involved fathering is possible even if the father himself did not experience involved fathering in his family-of-origin. Fathers with disengaged fathers in the family-of-origin may still depict themselves as involved fathers with their own children.

It seems that there are two possible pathways toward manifesting a discontinuity in the intergenerational transmission of disengaged fathering. The psychological mechanisms underlying these pathways are beyond the current study, but such mechanisms can be speculated upon. First, men change their supposed destinies (i.e., replicating disengaged fathering) by making a conscious decision to create a corrective experience with their own children. Second, mothers may have engaged in facilitative maternal gatekeeping which encouraged and helped fathers who moderated the intergenerational transmission of disengaged fathering. Thus, it is possible that even if

men themselves were not independently motivated to change, a corrective experience may have taken place if more involved fathering is encouraged by their partner.

Studies reveal that mothers' views of the father role as important is positively associated with the level of paternal involvement with their children (DeLuccie, 1995; Fagan, Newash, & Schloesser, 2000). Accordingly, it may be reasoned that mothers' positive experience with an involved father in the family-of-origin would lead them to engage in facilitative maternal gatekeeping that encourages father involvement in the current nuclear family. It may also be reasoned that women's lack of involved fathering in the family-of-origin could influence this same corrective action. Examination of the ways by which mothers influence father involvement is again beyond the scope of the present study, but results hint at the possibility that a mother's experience in childhood may shape her views of the "ideal" father role. Few studies to date consider how both fathers' and mothers' relationships with their fathers in the family-of-origin may impact fathering in the adult nuclear family. Future research is needed to further explore the intricacies of this phenomenon.

As articulated by Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008), maternal gatekeeping behaviors need to be considered in terms of both inhibitory *and* facilitative capacities. The findings of the present study are consistent with previous findings which suggest that fathers' involvement is influenced not only by their own gender role attitudes, but gender role attitudes of their wives/partners as well (Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Pleck, 1983). In light of the present study's speculation that mothers have the power to influence fathers' involvement, examining mothers' facilitative maternal gatekeeping can be viewed as highly important. Although research supports the notion that mothers who place greater

importance on the father role tend to partner with men who are more involved fathers (Fagan & Barnett, 2003), research exploring factors that cause women to value a “modern” degree of father involvement is less abundant. It seems probable that, just as men who experience involved fathering during childhood tend to become involved fathers themselves, women too would value experiencing involved fathering in the family-of-origin and consequently engage in maternal gatekeeping behaviors that promote father involvement in their husbands/partners. Barnett & Baruch (1987) suggest that mothers with a more liberal idea of gender roles engage in behaviors that encourage greater father involvement. However, there appear to be only a few older studies that have explored how mothers’ relationships with their father in the family-of-origin affect her maternal gatekeeping behaviors (Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983; Radin, 1981). More specifically, the question of what motivates facilitative maternal gatekeeping behaviors needs to be explored further. Echoing the question posed about fathers: Are women’s facilitative maternal gatekeeping behaviors more frequently motivated by a desire for their husbands/partners to emulate their own fathers’ involvement in the family-of-origin or to compensate for it? Although the present study contributes to this knowledge, additional research is needed to better understand this phenomenon.

Philip and Carolyn Cowan’s pioneering contributions in family intervention work, specifically working to help people improve parenting skills through marital or couple therapy, dates back to the 1960s. The Cowans’ work has shown that planned, experimental interventions have the potential not only to improve the functioning of a targeted participant(s), but can also effect positive change for children’s functioning and the functioning of the family as a whole (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Cowan et al., 2005;

Parke, Schulz, Pruett, & Kerig, in press). Considering research that supports the idea that the birth of a baby is a highly stressful life event that tends to negatively affect the relationship between the mother and father (Gottman, Gottman, & Shapiro, in press; Shapiro, Gottman, & Carrere, 2000), it is important to note that interventions are arguably most effective when conducted early in the child's life—or perhaps even before the child is born, during the transition to parenthood.

In the present study, the change in SFI participants' pictorial representations of father involvement across generations not only supports the notion that intergenerational transmission of parenting can be moderated but also that clinical interventions can effect positive change for men across generations. In the larger SFI intervention, it was found that intervention families, compared to families assigned to a low-dose comparison condition, displayed beneficial changes in how engaged fathers were, in the couple relationship, and in children's identified problem behaviors. Participants in couple's groups rather than fathers-only groups or the control condition showed the most long-lasting, consistent positive effects of all three conditions. This finding indicates that strengthening the couple relationship is a valuable, if not optimal, intervention due to the strong impact that the quality of the couple relationship has on fathers' involvement and, ultimately, child development.

There are a number of strengths in the present study. First, by asking both mothers and fathers to depict family relations, the study attends to Simon, Whitbeck, Conger, & Melby's (1990) and Tanfer & Mott's (1997) concern that more studies exploring parenting need to gather data from fathers as well as mothers. Second, the present study's sample is comprised of over 40% Hispanic mothers and fathers. Lamb (2002) and Jarret,

Roy, & Burton (2002) are just some of the researchers who have noted that the majority of studies on fathers have employed middle class, White families and that there is a need to involve diverse populations in father involvement research. Although specifically exploring racial, ethnic, or cultural differences was beyond the breadth of this study, participants in the study do represent an understudied population in the father involvement literature.

Future research would benefit from analyzing the data for such cultural differences. Doing so would require expanding the study's sample size; the small sample size makes it problematic to generalize findings to a larger cohort of fathers. The use of convenience sampling in this study, a method which provides no insurance that the sample will be a legitimate representation of the larger population, is also a limitation. Another limitation involves the fact that the Family Circles instrument is used to collect retrospective data, data which Belsky et al. (2009b) note can be problematic because it usually relies heavily on judgment and interpretation. In the present study, there is a particular danger that participants' retrospective assessments may be prone to bias because people tend to believe that their behavior/parenting is superior to the way their parents parented them. Additionally, a portion of the participants did not use the standard Family Circles instrument displayed in Appendix A. Although the coding rules were applied rigorously to these nonstandard forms, it must be acknowledged that the lack of consistency could have affected the results.

Finally, the current study does not take into consideration other variables (i.e., "third variables," mediating variables) to which depictions of father involvement might be correlated. The finding that either mothers' or fathers' relationship with an involved

father in the family-of-origin may correspond to involved fathering in the current nuclear family is consistent with other data showing that fathers' behavior is determined by multiple factors and that mothers may only be one of those causal variables (McBride, Schoppe, Ho, & Rane, 2004; Nangle et al., 2003). Simons et al. (1990) argue that

Lacking any guiding theory, investigators have employed a rather eclectic approach to the selection of variables for study. Most studies focus upon one or two constructs while ignoring the impact of factors found to be important in other investigations. As a consequence, it is not clear how the factors found to be associated with parenting in the various studies are related to each other (p. 376).

Accordingly, future research should attempt to investigate and understand how various factors cited in the literature affect father involvement and how they interact with one another. In addition to the suggestions derived from the present study about the need to examine the co-parental relationship and maternal gatekeeping behaviors (also emphasized by others: i.e., Shoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008; Belsky & Volling, 1989), this challenging task will involve considering the wide range of variables found to impact father involvement, including marital satisfaction and stability (Bonney et al., 1999; Kalmijn, 1999), mothers' perceptions of fathers' competence (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Lamb, 1986), mothers' employment status (Barnett & Baruch, 1987), amount of educational attainment (Brim, 1959; Harman & Brim, 1980), residential versus non-residential status of the father (Fagan & Barnett, 2003), socioeconomic status (Deutsch, Lussier, & Servis, 1993; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2001), and perceptions of child temperament (Simons et al., 1990). Future attempts to measure intergenerational changes in fathers' structural positions while simultaneously exploring variables that mediate or moderate the intergenerational transmission of father involvement are needed.

Despite these limitations of the present study, it does contribute to an area of research that is limited and ripe for further investigation. The Family Circles instrument provides an advantageous, yet greatly underused, assessment of generational structural positions. It is noteworthy, as well as uplifting, that both mothers' and fathers' reports corroborate the finding of a generational shift in the direction of increased father involvement. Without this consensus, questions of a gendered distortion, either by women or men, regarding actual father involvement would need to be called into question. Although a connection was determined between fathering in one generation and subsequent fathering, the current findings suggest that, for the most part, the intergenerational transmission of fathering most often occurs with involved fathering rather than disengaged fathering. The notion that individual efforts and attitudes have the power to overrule one's exposure to and experience with a disengaged father is something people want to believe in and, as indicated by this study, can believe in.

References

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Appendix A

Family Circles Instrument

Name _____

Today's date ___/___/___

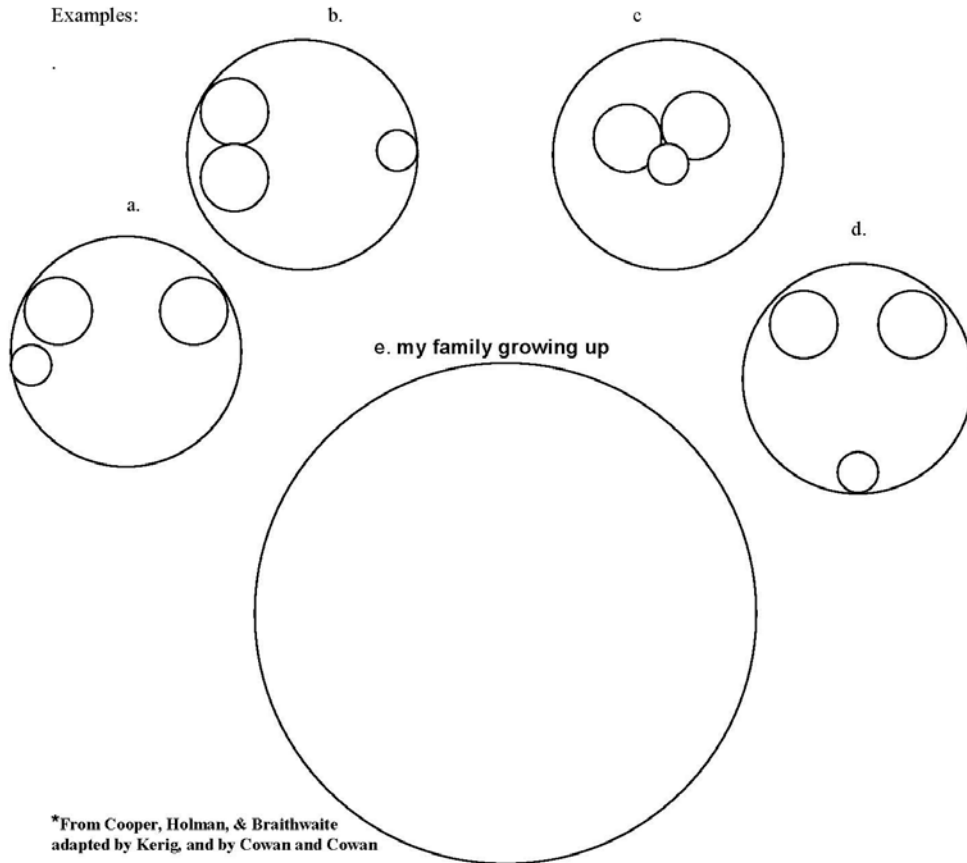
FAMILY CIRCLES 1*

Each diagram below (a-d) represents different families. In any family, there may be some family members who are especially close to one another while other family members are more distant or separate from each other. The circles represent the people and the space between the circles represents the closeness or distance of the relationships between them. The large circles are the adults and the smaller circles are the children.

Please look at examples a-d which describe some possible arrangements for a three-person family. Then, in circle e, draw a picture that you think is most like YOUR FAMILY GROWING UP with all the members (yourself as a child, your parents, your siblings, etc.), adding circles for the number of people in your family.

Last, please write each person's relationship to you (such as, mother, father, sister, brother, grandmother, stepfather, etc.) inside or beside the circle representing that person. Also indicate which circle represents you.

Examples:



*From Cooper, Holman, & Braithwaite
adapted by Kerig, and by Cowan and Cowan

Name _____

Today's date ___/___/___

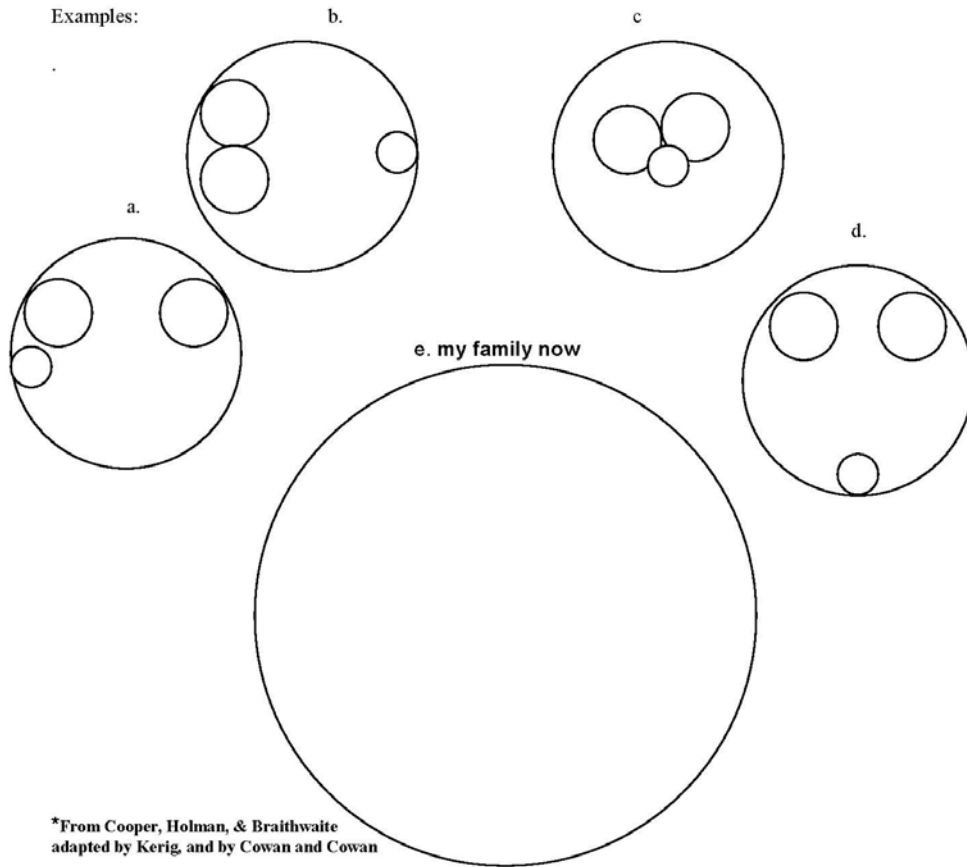
FAMILY CIRCLES 2*

Each diagram below (a-d) represents different families. In any family, there may be some family members who are especially close to one another while other family members are more distant or separate from each other. The circles represent the people and the space between the circles represents the closeness or distance of the relationships between them. The large circles are the adults and the smaller circles are the children.

Please look at examples a-d which describe some possible arrangements for a three-person family. Then, in circle e, draw a picture that you think is most like YOUR FAMILY NOW with all the members (yourself, your partner, your child/children), adding circles for the number of people in your family.

Last, please write each person's relationship to you (such as, wife, husband, son, daughter, etc.) inside or beside the circle representing that person. **If you have more than one child, please add their first names.** Also indicate which circle represents you.

Examples:



*From Cooper, Holman, & Braithwaite
adapted by Kerig, and by Cowan and Cowan

Appendix B

Coding Form

Supporting Father Involvement FAMILY CIRCLES CODING SHEET

Family ID: _____ Mother OR Father (circle) Coder: _____

FAMILY CIRCLES 1: **“YOUR FAMILY GROWING UP”**

1. Check the number of parents (mother and father; *not* parental figures) inside the circle:

(1) Two Parents ___ (2) One Parent ___ (3) No Parents ___

2. Check one of the following family structures:

(1) Cohesive ___ (2) Divided ___ (3) Isolated Child ___
(4) Parent Coalition ___ (5) Triangulated ___

Descriptions:

Cohesive = family members close/touching;

Divided = family members separated from each other;

Isolated Child = parents together/allied, possibly with children, but one child is separate from both parents;

Parent Coalition = parents form a cohesive group, separate from the children

Triangulated = one child is allied with one parent, and other parent is separate from that parent-child relationship but included in the circle;

3. Check the placement of the mother in the circle:

(1) Center ___ (2) On/Near Periphery ___ (3) Outside or Not Present ___
(4) Inside the Circle, but neither center nor periphery ___

4. Check the placement of the father in the circle:

(1) Center ___ (2) On/Near Periphery ___ (3) Outside or Not Present ___
(4) Inside the Circle, but neither center nor periphery ___

5. Check the distance between mother and father:

(1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

6. Check the distance between respondent (“me”) and mother:

(1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

7. Check the distance between respondent ("me") and father:

- (1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

8. Check the *shortest* distance between siblings:

- (1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

9. Check the *longest* distance between siblings:

- (1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

10. Is there a sibling coalition? (Two or more children close/touching, separate from parents)

- (1) Yes ___ (2) No ___

11. Check any extended family members included in the circle:

- (1) Grandparent(s) ___ (2) Aunt/Uncle(s) ___ (3) Cousin(s) ___ (4) Other(s) ___
Please specify:

Supporting Father Involvement
FAMILY CIRCLES CODING SHEET

Family ID: _____ *Mother* OR *Father* (circle) Coder: _____

FAMILY CIRCLES 2: **“YOUR FAMILY NOW”**

12. Check the number of parents (mother and father; *not other parental figures*) inside the circle:

(1) Two Parents ___ (2) One Parent ___ (3) No Parents ___

13. Check one of the following family structures:

(1) Cohesive ___ (2) Divided ___ (3) Isolated Child ___
(4) Parent Coalition ___ (5) Triangulated ___

Descriptions:

Cohesive = family members close/touching;

Divided = family members separated from each other;

Isolated Child = parents together/allied, possibly with children, but one child is separate from both parents;

Parent Coalition = parents form a cohesive group, separate from the children

Triangulated = one child is allied with one parent, and other parent is separate from that parent-child relationship but included in the circle.

14. Check the placement of the mother in the circle:

(1) Center ___ (2) On/Near Periphery ___ (3) Outside or Not Present ___
(4) Inside the Circle, but neither center nor periphery ___

15. Check the placement of the father in the circle:

(1) Center ___ (2) On/Near Periphery ___ (3) Outside or Not Present ___
(4) Inside the Circle, but neither center nor periphery ___

16. Check the distance between mother and father:

(1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

17. Check the distance between target child and mother:

(1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

18. Check the distance between target child and father:

- (1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

19. Check the *shortest* distance between siblings:

- (1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

20. Check the *longest* distance between siblings:

- (1) Overlapping ___ (2) Touching ___ (3) Less than 2 cm apart ___
(4) 2-5 cm apart ___ (5) Greater than 5 cm apart ___ (6) indeterminable/NA ___

21. Is there a sibling coalition? (Two or more children close/touching, separate from parents)

- (1) Yes ___ (2) No ___

22. Check any extended family members included in the circle:

- (1) Grandparent(s) ___ (2) Aunt/Uncle(s) ___ (3) Cousin(s) ___ (4) Other(s) ___
Please specify:

