

SUPPORT WITH FATHERING AN ADOLESCENT DAUGHTER:  
A HEURISTIC INVESTIGATION OF MEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH A TARGETED  
FATHERING INTERVENTION

by

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## ABSTRACT

This heuristic study explored and described the experiences of fathers who participated in an intervention designed to promote and improve their relationships with their adolescent daughter(s). Despite increasing interest in the distinct contribution that fathers make to the development and well-being of their children, the father-daughter relationship remains the least studied and least understood of all parent-child pairings. Paternal involvement is a powerfully protective influence for girls—particularly as girls enter into adolescence and prepare for adulthood—yet there remain few interventions that are specifically designed to support fathers at this critical time. This study examined the experiences of 11 fathers who participated in an innovative grassroots fathering intervention in order to help identify more effective ways to recruit and support men in programs designed to promote the father/adolescent-daughter relationship. Participants served as co-researchers for this study by providing information about their experiences in the fathering intervention and with fathering an adolescent daughter. Findings provided general support for the conceptual ethic of generative fathering by affirming the positive abilities and good intentions of the participating fathers. The findings also indicated the importance of including both psychoeducation and skills training in these types of targeted interventions. Competencies for therapeutic work with fathers are identified along with recommendations for how these competencies can be more widely and effectively implemented.

*Keywords:* father-daughter relationship, female adolescence development, paternal engagement, fathering interventions, generative fathering

## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to a select group of daughters and to a son. Before all others, this study is dedicated to Reinhold's daughter, my wife, Barbara: Without your infinite encouragement and practical support, this project would have been impossible. I am at a loss to express the gratitude that I feel in being united to such a strong and grounded woman. Discovering our "new normal" is something that I anticipate with joy and expectation. Next, this study is dedicated to my girls: Marie, Leah, and Emma. Throughout most (if not all) of your lives you have had to share me with graduate studies. Now that my "book" is written, I look forward to more fully entering into the delight of your individual presences. I pray that some of what I have learned will prove to be of benefit to you and to me as we share the days that are given to us. Not to be excluded, I offer a final dedication to my son, Joel. May you also be blessed with the privilege of fathering a daughter. With three big sisters, you will be well prepared for the task.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables.....	xii
List of Figures.....	xiii
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	 1
Background of the Problem.....	2
Fathers Are Important but Understudied.....	2
The Father-Daughter Relationship.....	4
Navigating Adolescence.....	4
Fathering an Adolescent Daughter.....	6
Supports to the Relationship and Barriers to Support.....	8
The Abba Project.....	9
Generative Fathering.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	13
Research Questions.....	13
Research Approach.....	14
Significance of the Study.....	16
Assumptions and Limitations.....	17
Key Terms.....	18
Father Involvement, Father Engagement.....	18

Father Connection and Father Bond.....	18
Attachment.....	19
Differentiation, Individuation, and Separation.....	19
Adolescence/Adolescent Transition.....	19
Parenting Services, Family Support Services, Fathering Services.....	19
Conceptual Framework.....	20
Summary.....	21
Organization of the Remaining Chapters.....	22
 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	 23
Context of Fathering.....	24
Fathers, Mothers, and the Parental Relationship.....	25
Fatherwork and Work.....	30
Research Support for the Importance of the Father-Daughter Relationship.....	34
Female Adolescent Development and Fathering.....	34
Specific Areas of Importance.....	46
Generativity: Fathering Behavior and Men’s Development.....	59
Interventions Designed to Promote Fathering of Adolescent Daughters.....	67
Men’s Involvement in Therapeutic Services.....	67
Increasing Father Involvement in Family Services.....	73
Support for The Abba Project Fathering Intervention.....	80
Support for the Methodology of this Study.....	83
Summary.....	86



CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	87
Research Design.....	87
About the Researcher.....	91
Research Questions.....	92
Selection of Participants.....	93
Data Collection and Analysis.....	95
Data Collection.....	95
Data Analysis.....	98
Trustworthiness.....	100
Ethics.....	102
Summary.....	104
 CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	 106
Participant.....	107
Demographic Information.....	107
Individual Participants.....	112
Findings.....	126
Research Question One: Findings (Themes) Related to the Experience of Fathering an Adolescent Daughter.....	 130
Research Question Two: Findings (Themes) Related to Overcoming Barriers to Help Seeking.....	 149
Research Question Three: Findings (Themes) Related to the Experience of Participating	

in a Fathering Intervention.....	159
Research Question Four: Findings (Themes) Related to Changes in the Relationship.....	169
Research Question Five: Findings (Themes) Related to How Fathers Have Changed as a Result of Their Experience.....	189
Research Question Six: Findings (Themes) Related to Recommendations for Other Fathers.....	198
Summary.....	207
 CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	209
Interpretation of Findings.....	210
Research Question One.....	210
Research Question Two.....	212
Research Question Three.....	215
Research Question Four.....	217
Research Question Five.....	221
Research Question Six.....	223
Implications for Social Change.....	225
Recommendations for Action.....	226
Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study.....	228
Limitations.....	228
Recommendations for Further Study.....	229
Relocating the Researcher in Light of the Findings.....	230

Summary.....	233
Final Summary.....	233
REFERENCES.....	235
Appendices.....	264
APPENDIX A: Interview Guide.....	264
APPENDIX B: Letter of Invitation.....	265
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form.....	267
APPENDIX D: Demographic Survey.....	269
APPENDIX E: Journaling Prompt.....	272

## **List of Tables**

Table 4.1.....	109
Table 4.2.....	112
Table 4.3.....	129
Table 4.4.....	149
Table 4.5.....	159
Table 4.6.....	169
Table 4.7.....	189
Table 4.8.....	198
Table 4.9.....	207

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1.....	21
Figure 4.1.....	131
Figure 4.2.....	150
Figure 4.3.....	160
Figure 4.4 .....	170
Figure 4.5.....	190
Figure 4.6.....	199

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The relationship between a father and his daughter has the potential to be rich and meaningful, with identified benefits accruing to both sides when the connection is strong and well maintained (Nielsen, 2014). Unfortunately, there are a number of threats to this relationship, particularly as girls enter adolescence and prepare for the transition into womanhood (Morgan, Wilcoxon, & Satcher, 2003). Fathers often struggle to maintain the connection with their daughters during this time, though they retain a desire to do so (Costello, 2004). This trend is troubling given the mounting evidence that attests to the value that paternal engagement can provide to daughters during adolescence and early adulthood (Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011; Lamb, 2010).

Despite a growing recognition of the importance of fathers and some efforts to promote their engagement, there is a lack of specific resources that are designed to support the father/adolescent-daughter relationship (Panter-Brick, Burgess, Eggerman, McAllister, Pruett, & Leckerman, 2014). In addition, those services that are available often fail to take fathers' unique needs and preferences into account (Lloyd, O'Brien, & Lewis, 2003; Raikes, Summers, & Roggman, 2005). Developing and refining such resources requires a greater understanding of the experiences and perspectives that fathers bring to the relationship.

This qualitative study addressed this challenge by attending directly to the voices of a select group of fathers—namely, fathers who participated in a fathering group that focused on improving their connection to their adolescent or young adult daughters. The perspective that these fathers provided offered important insights about the challenges, barriers, and benefits that these men associate with fathering a daughter through this stage. By virtue of their participation in a targeted fathering intervention, the men who served as co-researchers in this study had a

unique opportunity to talk about the factors that contribute to a stronger, more durable, and more mutually satisfying father-daughter connection.

This initial chapter makes a case for both the utility and the necessity of this study by highlighting gaps and trends in current research on the father/adolescent-daughter relationship along with the general lack of supports available to enhance this relationship. Additionally, this chapter includes the purpose of the study, research questions, research approach, conceptual framework, and research significance. In keeping with standard practices for a qualitative study (Pyrzczak & Bruce, 2007), the chapter presents assumptions and limitations of the study and operational definitions of terms relevant to this study. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters of the research study.

### **Background of the Problem**

This section highlights the value of this study by identifying numerous gaps in the existing literature on fathering, giving specific attention to the history of research on fathers, benefits associated with a strong father-daughter connection, the challenges the relationship faces when daughters enter adolescence, and the lack of resources that are currently available to help fathers overcome these challenges. This section includes a description of generative fathering as a conceptual ethic which can be used to guide and inform both fathering and father-focused interventions, as well as a brief description of the co-researchers' fathering intervention that provides an essential context to understanding the perspective they bring to the topic.

### **Fathers Are Important but Understudied**

After being largely passed over by parenting researchers during the last century, the past three decades have seen an explosion of interest in fathers. This interest has been driven by multiple factors, but among them are the crisis of fatherlessness that was widely documented

during the 1990s (Hofferth, Pleck, Goldscheider, Curtin, & Hrapczynski, 2013; Snarey, 1993), a recognition of the historic neglect of fathers by parenting researchers (Barber & Thomas, 1986; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999; Lamb, 2000; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985; Nielsen, 2007), and the emergence of an increasingly robust literature attesting to the value that accrues from fathers' meaningful involvement in the lives of their children (Allen & Daly, 2007; Lamb, 2010). This last stream of research has resulted in renewed appreciation for the distinct contribution that fathers make to the development and well-being of their children (Amato, 1994; Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Roggman, 2014). Allen and Daly (2007) reviewed the literature on paternal involvement and noted that it is associated with more positive outcomes for children across dimensions of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Interestingly, greater levels of involved parenting have been found to benefit fathers as well (Bradford & Hawkins, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002).

Quantitative data, compiled through surveys, questionnaires, and extensive observation, has established the existence of a positive relationship between father involvement and improved child outcomes (Allen & Daly, 2007; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999). Enriching these data, an expanding use of qualitative measures has been employed both to enhance theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and provide greater access to the lived experiences of fathers and their offspring. The need for an increased use of qualitative methods in the study of fatherhood has been widely expressed (Allgood, Beckert, & Peterson, 2012; Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999; Lamb, 2000; Nielsen, 2007), and one method employed to meet this need is a renewed focus on what fathers themselves have to say (Behnke, Taylor, & Parra-Cardona, 2008; Brotherson, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 2005; Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Hutchinson & Cedarbaum,



2011). Nevertheless, gaps remain in understanding the experiences and challenges of special populations of fathers, including fathers of adolescent daughters.

### **The Father-Daughter Relationship**

Another limitation that has been identified in the literature is the minimal focus on how fathers differentially relate to and influence their sons versus their daughters. To the extent that they were included in parenting research in the past, fathers tended to be considered in terms of their function as sex role models for their sons (Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson, & Kaufman, 2011; Carine & Jan, 1998). The relationship between fathers and daughters was significantly underexplored. Progress has been made in this area, though the father-daughter relationship continues to be the least studied and the most poorly understood of all parent-child pairings (Allgood et al., 2012; Krampe, 2009; Lamb, 2010). This is particularly true when considering fathers' relationships with their adolescent daughters.

The research that has emerged about the father-daughter relationship supports the assertion that high-quality father involvement is a profoundly positive influence for daughters across a range of important dimensions. Although a daughter's relationship with her father provides positive benefits throughout her lifespan (Lamb, 2010; Snarey, 1993), many of the benefits that are most dramatic and impactful tend to be realized in or around the time of adolescence (Nielsen, 2014). The following section details some of the benefits associated with the relationship at this stage along with a number of factors that threaten the greater realization of those benefits.

### **Navigating Adolescence**

Researchers wisely recognize adolescence as one of the most critical but challenging of developmental stages (Benson, Mannes, Pittman, & Ferber, 2004). As young people transition

from childhood to adolescence, they enter into a period that is characterized by turbulent changes in social, emotional, and physiological domains. Peer relationships simultaneously become more important and more complex (Santrock, 2015). In keeping with Erickson's (1968) assertion that adolescence is a time when individuals wrestle with themes of identity and role confusion, the onset of puberty is likely to challenge adolescents' existing conceptions of personal identity and self-image (Crocetti, Rubini, Branie, Koot, & Meeus, 2015). Peers increasingly rival parents in terms of the primacy of influence. To some degree, such changes are normal and necessary. In order to successfully transition to adulthood, adolescents must enter into a phase of separation and individuation from the parents upon whom they have largely been dependent. Though a certain amount of distancing is healthy for adolescents as they move toward the establishment of an independent identity, attachment to parents remains an important and stabilizing influence (Duchesne & Ratelle, 2014; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999). And, while it may be seen as developmentally normal, the tension associated with the adolescent transition can be distressing for parents and children alike.

Even as adolescents navigate the dramatic changes detailed above, parents face a developmental challenge of their own, one that requires them to move progressively from a role characterized by protective authority toward one focused on the promotion of freedom and personal responsibility (Moretti & Peled, 2014). In adjusting to changes brought on by adolescence, mothers and fathers have a tendency to respond differently to their sons and daughters (Amato, 1994; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Updegraff, Delgado, & Wheeler, 2009). Researchers have theorized that children gravitate toward their same-gender parent during adolescence as socialization in sex roles takes on greater importance (Carine & Jan, 1998; Daniels, 1990; Hess, Ittel, & Sisler, 2014). Perhaps as a result of this, research indicates that

fathers place a greater priority on interactions with their adolescent sons (Nielsen, 2007). Reflecting this, Nielsen (2007) found that fathers actually believe they are more important to their adolescent sons than to their adolescent daughters. This helps to explain why they talk more, disclose more, and share more advice with their sons during this stage (Nielsen, 2007). Such beliefs may also account for changes in the amount of time that fathers spend with their daughters once they enter adolescence. Whereas fathers spend a relatively equal amount of time with their sons and daughters during childhood, by the time they reach adolescence, fathers spend only about half as much direct time with daughters when compared with sons (0.5 hours versus 1.0 hours per weekday and 1.4 hours versus 2.0 hours on the weekend) (Ishii-Kunz, 1994). Contradicting this belief about second-importance, mounting evidence points to fathers as prominent figures in their daughters' development, a topic that is explored further in the next section.

### **Fathering an Adolescent Daughter**

The changes ushered in by the adolescent transition are likely to impact a daughter's relationship with her mother and her relationship with her father in different ways. While fathers have a positive role to play throughout their daughters' lives, their involvement during adolescence is an especially powerful and protective force (Carter & Almaraz, 2014; Demidenko, Manion, & Lee, 2015; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2014). Contrary to what many fathers believe, involvement with daughters at this stage is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, both in terms of internal realities and external outcomes. With regard to the former, daughters who experience positive father involvement report higher self-esteem (Mori, 1999; Scheffler & Naus, 1999; Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Blair, 1994), more positive body image (Elliot, 2010), and lower levels of depression (Demidenko et al., 2015; Jenkins, Goodness, &

Buhrmester, 2002; Videon, 2005). Because these internal realities are often expressed in outward behavior, it is unsurprising to find that girls who experience higher levels of father involvement have reduced incidence of disordered eating (Jones, Leung, & Harris, 2006), lower rates of criminal involvement (Letiecq, 2007), decreased levels of substance abuse (Boyd, Ashcraft, & Belgrave, 2006), and greater overall success in school and career (Lamb, 2010; Perkins, 2001). Fathers also seem to have a particularly strong influence in shaping girls' relationships with the opposite sex. Father involvement is associated with daughters being better able to relate to males (Flouri, 2005; Kast, 1997), a delay in sexual activity (Hutchinson, 2002; Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011), and lower rates of out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Peterson, 2006). In each of these areas, paternal involvement has been found to have an even greater impact than that exerted by the girl's mother.

Unfortunately, there is a corresponding body of literature that speaks to the challenges confronting the father-daughter relationship at this stage. Whether due to historical, cultural, familial, or personal factors, the relationship between fathers and daughters can be subject to a special strain during the adolescent transition (Roberts, Biblarz, & Bengston, 2002; Nielsen, 2014; Secunda, 1992). Though fathers desire to maintain a close connection with their daughters during this time (Costello, 2004), there is reason to believe that they are uncertain about how to do this (Schock & Gavazzi, 2005) and fail to recognize the importance of it (Nielsen, 2007).

Fathers meet a particular challenge in relating to their daughters when faced with the emerging sexuality that accompanies entrance into puberty (Wright, 2009). Flaake (2005) examined parental reactions to adolescent girls' bodily changes and noted that fathers may become less affectionate and more uncomfortable with close contact to their daughters as secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts, begin to appear. This is unfortunate given the

finding that paternal affection is associated with improved stress-responses (Byrd-Craven, Auer, Granger, & Massey, 2012) and better overall functioning (Veneziano, 2003) in daughters. Girls view mothers as more supportive of changes associated with puberty (Flaake, 2005), and for that reason mothers are the preferred parental contact in discussing these changes. Nevertheless, many girls wish that their fathers took a more active role in preparing them for sex and romantic relationships (Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011). Gaining an understanding of fathers' seemingly contradictory attitudes about their daughters' sexuality could provide clues about how fathers can be empowered to engage these issues more appropriately and supportively. The next section provides an overview of supports that are available to the father-daughter relationship, noting also some of the practical barriers that have inhibited their use.

### **Supports to the Relationship and Barriers to Support**

While the relationship between fathers and daughters is important to both parties, fathers often struggle to maintain the connection during the adolescent period. Despite evidence that family services can benefit fathers' connection to their children by increasing their skills, confidence, and involvement (Doherty, Erickson, & LaRossa, 2006; Magill-Evans, Harrison, Benzies, Gierl, & Kimak, 2007), parenting programs historically have been geared more toward the needs and preferences of mothers. Often this has resulted in interventions that neglect or passively exclude fathers from meaningful involvement (Holmes, Galovan, Yoshida, & Hawkins, 2010). Where they do exist, parenting interventions have primarily focused on addressing the needs of at-risk parents, parents of young children, or parents of children with special needs, whether developmental or behavioral (Fabiano, 2007). There is a conspicuous lack of services intentionally designed to assist general populations of fathers with addressing many typical, but still difficult, parenting issues. Even fewer services are available specifically

to support fathers with navigating the challenges they face in maintaining a connection with their adolescent daughters. Given both the importance of fathers at this stage and the multiple challenges they face, the need for services that are effective in empowering and preparing fathers for engagement with their daughters during the adolescent transition is apparent (Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Because such services must be tailored to the needs of a highly distinct population, it is unsurprising to note that there is very little in the way of empirical research on parenting supports for fathers of adolescent daughters. Where holes in the empirical research exist, qualitative studies, such as what is being proposed here, can be useful for advancing theoretical understanding and illuminating essential components of experience that are otherwise difficult to quantify (Creswell, 2017, p. 50). Recognizing that successful services must be rooted in a deep understanding of fathers' actual experiences with parenting an adolescent daughter warrants a closer examination of that experience. One service designed to promote father-daughter connection during this developmental period is The Abba Project.

### **The Abba Project**

While there continues to be a lack of widespread treatment protocols for the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, grassroots services have sprung up to address this important relationship. The Abba Project is one such grassroots service. This initiative, which offers support groups for fathers of adolescent to young-adult daughters, has been operating for over five years and has the express purpose of providing fathers with information and resources to enable them to invest more intentionally in their daughters' lives. Interestingly, The Abba Project developed out of a private counseling practice that catered to adolescent girls and women. The practice owner, Dr. Michelle Watson, reported that she saw dramatic changes

follow from her efforts to involve fathers more fully in the treatment of their daughters (personal communication, June 2, 2016). This experience led Dr. Watson to develop a program specifically designed to intervene with these young women by promoting father involvement. The success of this approach has resulted in the continuation of stand-alone fathering groups where participation does not require that daughters be clinically involved (Watson, 2013).

Because services for fathers of adolescent girls are rare, the perspectives and experiences of fathers who have actually participated in an intervention of this kind can be expected to provide useful insights. Per Dr. Watson's reports, the fathers in her groups tend to place a high value on the quality of their relationships with their daughters (personal communication, June 2 2016). At the same time, these men are motivated toward and receptive to treatment because they are experiencing a level of frustration in the relationship. These qualities make The Abba Project fathers ideal candidates to serve as co-researchers for a qualitative study focused on fathering a daughter through the potentially challenging stage of adolescence. Because they have participated in a fathering intervention, these fathers can also speak into a critical gap in the extant literature (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudhry, 2009; Cosson & Graham, 2012). Specifically, they can help answer the research question: What drives men to participate in fathering services, and what aspects of those services do they find most helpful and appealing?

### **Generative Fathering**

Despite a wealth of data on the heuristic value of paternal involvement, much of the research on fathers has approached the topic of fathering from a deficit perspective: focusing on the inadequacies of fathers and the negative outcomes that can be linked with their non-involvement or absence. Beckert, Strom, and Strom (2006) observed that the negative view of fathers that accompanies a deficit perspective tends to exacerbate the problem further by

dispiriting and alienating fathers rather than empowering and engaging them. In seeking to reverse this negative trend, Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson (1997) proposed the conceptual ethic of *generative fathering*. Because of its positive perspective on fathers, generative fathering provides a unifying framework that is useful for understanding, engaging, and intervening with fathers. Such a strength-based perspective mirrors the trend in positive psychology that has found empirical support for placing a greater emphasis on strengths and successes than on problems and shortcomings (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). An overview of the development of the generative fathering framework and research support for this conceptual ethic follows.

Snarey (1993) made a seminal contribution to the field of fatherhood research with the publication of his four-decade study on fatherhood. Snarey summarized his findings with the bold assertion that “good fathering, it seems, really does matter. It matters over a long time, over a lifetime, and even over generations” (p. 356). Interpreting Snarey’s work through the lens of Erikson’s (1968) theory on psycho-social development, Dollahite and Hawkins (1998) described the task of fathering as generative work. According to the authors, generative fathering involves responding in consistent and flexible ways to the developmental needs of a child over time. Expanding upon this concept, Dollahite and Hawkins articulated a conceptual ethic of fatherhood that is made up of seven domains of *fatherwork* including: (a) relationship work (working to create a healthy relationship); (b) stewardship work (providing for the physical needs and safety of children); (c) development work (changing to meet changing needs); (d) ethical work (teaching children values and helping them to relate with others in moral ways); (e) spiritual work (working to help children obtain purpose and joy); (f) recreational work (helping children relax and have fun); and (g) mentoring work (helping older children learn skills to be a



successful parent). While each of these domains loosely ties to a specific phase of child development, it is important for fathers to maintain active fatherwork in each of the domains throughout the duration of their relationship to their children.

Far from envisioning fathers as deficient or as figures who are peripheral to the family, proponents of a generative fathering framework affirm that fathers are charged with “an obligation to meet the needs of the next generation” (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998, p. 110). The focus is on fathers’ strengths and on the unique contributions that they make to the family. This emphasis, combined with a lifespan development perspective, leads to the assertion that generative fathering connects generations by establishing positive bonds with children, instilling values, and providing for mutual support. In a final assertion of the guiding ethic of generative fathering, Brotherson et al. (2005) promote the view that “most fathers have both the capacity and the responsibility to build positive, healthy relationships with their children” (p. 4). A more detailed review of research findings on the generative fathering framework will be provided in Chapter Two.

In tracing the trends in research on fatherhood and supports to the father-daughter relationship, this section has identified a meaningful gap in the literature. Specifically, the lack of significant research focus on the father-daughter relationship has resulted in researchers identifying this dyad as the least studied and most poorly understood of all parent-child pairings (Allgood et al., 2012; Krampe, 2009; Lamb, 2010). In addition to being understudied, the father-daughter relationship has historically been underserved by therapists and family service providers. Given the important role that this relationship plays in the healthy development of both daughters and fathers, it is a prime area for further investigation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The preceding section offered some necessary background to this study by surveying literature in areas that are relevant to the phenomenon of fathering an adolescent daughter. The literature makes clear that increased levels of paternal involvement are associated with a wide range of positive benefits for daughters. Confounding this, the research also speaks to a disruption in the father-daughter relationship as girls enter puberty and navigate the developmental challenges associated with individuation and separation from parents. While empirical research has served to highlight fathers' importance to their adolescent daughters, qualitative methods may be useful in gaining an understanding of the meanings that fathers associate with parenting an adolescent daughter and with participation in services that are designed to promote this relationship.

Given the dearth of research on interventions that target the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, this study sought to explore the lived experience of a select group of fathers who self-identified the need for an intervention designed to improve the relationship at this stage. The literature notes a number of challenges in recruiting and engaging fathers in family-oriented services, so a further aim of this study was to learn about fathers' experiences of considering, deciding for, and eventually participating in a fathering intervention.

### **Research Questions**

In keeping with this study's purpose of learning about what a select group of fathers had to say about the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter and participating in an intervention intended to promote this relationship, the key research questions this study seeks to answer are:

1. What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter?
  - a. How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?
2. How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking?
3. How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention?
4. How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group?
5. How would they say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?
6. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters?

### **Research Approach**

Creswell (2017, p. 48) reflects a common perspective among counseling and psychology researchers with his assertion that decisions about research methodology should flow directly from the explicit goals of a particular study. The present study incorporated a qualitative approach in order to gain rich insight into the lived experience of a select group of fathers (Portney & Watkins, 2009). Within the qualitative tradition, heuristic research stands apart as an approach that embraces the central importance of the self and presence of the researcher. According to Moustakas (1990), “Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (p. 15). A qualitative

heuristic approach was identified for this study because it allowed the researcher to engage personally with the topic of fathering an adolescent daughter by learning about the experiences of a select group of fathers who could meaningfully speak to the phenomenon. Heuristics differs from other qualitative approaches in the extent to which it empowers the person of the researcher to engage directly with the subject of investigation. Taking a heuristic approach enabled the researcher to interact with the topic personally and to contextualize the received data in the larger discussions of fatherhood, fathering a daughter, generative fathering, and engagement with men in therapy.

While heuristic inquiry can take many forms, depending upon the nature of the phenomenon it seeks to discover, it necessarily follows a progression through stages of engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and eventual culmination through creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). By providing source material for the researcher's individual engagement with a research question, the immersion stage typically consists of extended interviews with individuals who have personal experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990, p. 46). For the purpose of this study, extended interviews with fathers from The Abba Project served to provide the primary source material. To supplement and frame the information gleaned from these interviews, journals and demographic survey data were also collected from the participants. Validation of the findings was achieved through a process of "member checking" and ongoing dialogue with the research participants. This interaction was instrumental to ensuring that the data was assimilated, processed, and explicated in an accurate and meaningful way. Chapter Three provides a fuller description of the philosophical underpinnings and methodological practices employed by this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

In investigating a topic as broad and encompassing as the father-daughter relationship, I am mindful of the fact that every person is touched, in one way or another, by the broader reach of the phenomenon. Within that expansive reach, this study is significant for three distinct populations. Most narrowly and immediately, the topic is intimately important to me. That fact accounts for the selection of a heuristic approach. In acknowledging a personal interest in the topic, Moustakas's assertion is pertinent: "The heuristic process is autobiographic...with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance" (1990, p. 15). Focusing on the domain of social significance, this study shows particular relevance to two additional groups.

By providing an enriched understanding of the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter, this study has the potential to benefit all men who are fortunate enough to have this experience. The accumulated insights and personal meanings that the co-researchers attach to their fathering experience and to their participation with a fathering intervention may help other fathers navigate what can be a challenging season in the father-daughter relationship. Finally, by addressing a critical gap in the literature on parenting services for fathers, this study may provide clinicians and family service workers with information about how such services can better account for the felt needs and expressed preferences of fathers themselves. Inclusion of such perspectives in the development and implementation of fathering interventions can be expected to improve the utilization and success of these services (Berlyn, Wise, & Soriano, 2008; Fabiano, 2007; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

Every study is based on a set of working assumptions. The philosophical outlook, priorities, and immediate goals of a study necessarily shape decisions about methodology and design (Kazdin, 2016). Given that reality, it is a standard practice in research writing to identify the underlying assumptions of a particular study along with any limitations that may be associated with the research approach. In keeping with that practice, a number of important assumptions and limitations inherent in the design of the current study bear further articulation.

At the outset, assumptions about the nature and importance of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship should be stipulated. While these assumptions are drawn from the research literature—briefly covered in the background section of this chapter and more fully explicated in Chapter Two—their importance to the present study makes them worthy of explicit acknowledgment. The four assumptions that form a working model for this study are as follows:

1. Fathers play an important role in the lives of their daughters (Carter & Almaraz, 2014; Nielsen, 2014);
2. Fathers often struggle to maintain the connection with their daughters during adolescence (Roberts et al., 2002; Schock & Gavazzi, 2005; Updegraff et al., 2009);
3. Fathers can benefit from interventions that are designed to promote their engagement during this stage (Doherty et al., 2006; Watson, 2013); and
4. Services to fathers are most effective when they are grounded in and informed by an understanding of the actual experience of these fathers (Berlyn et al., 2008; Fabiano, 2007; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

In prioritizing the experience of fathers, this study employed a qualitative heuristic design. Because this approach deeply involves the person of the researcher, the study is certain

to have been influenced by the subjective judgments and interpretations of this researcher. With heuristic research, this fact is seen as a feature and not a liability. While the researcher remains front and center in the process of discovery, he maintains an ongoing process of verification through critical dialogue with the empirical literature, the emerging data, and most importantly, the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). Recognizing that the research methodology selected for this study is central to its conception and design, Chapter Three provides a fuller treatment of the benefits and limitations associated with the method.

### **Key Terms**

A working knowledge of key terms is essential to an accurate understanding of the research concepts. While the terminology at hand is not especially technical or jargon laden, it is useful to provide a general definition of relevant terms. The definitions that follow derive from the literature that pertains to each term.

#### **Father Involvement, Father Engagement**

Conceptions of fatherhood have shifted in such a way that terms such as *involvement* and *engagement* have taken on fluid meaning. Various authors employ preferred terms in idiosyncratic ways that make it difficult to arrive at a consensus of their meaning. Because these terms are essential to the literature on fathering, operational definitions—where relevant—are included with the review of individual studies found in Chapter Two. However, in general, the terms *involvement* and *engagement* are used interchangeably to imply both temporal measure and qualitative aspects of a father's interactions with his child(ren) (Brotherson et al., 2005).

#### **Father Connection and Father Bond**

*Connection* and *bond* are understood to convey a sense of the strength and quality of the relationship that exists between a father and his child(ren) (Lamb, 2010; Snarey, 1993).

**Attachment**

Grounded in the seminal work of John Bowlby (1969) and Mary Ainsworth (1973), *attachment* refers to a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (Bowlby, p. 194).

**Differentiation, Individuation, and Separation**

Each of these terms carries a highly specific meaning within the tradition from which it originated. For the purpose of this study, the terms are used without distinction to refer to the process whereby an individual progressively moves toward the establishment of an independent and autonomous identity. This process is understood to be a gradual movement from a position of relative dependence toward the eventual realization of a mature and independent psychological identity (Mahler, 1971).

**Adolescence/Adolescent Transition**

Santrock (2015) characterizes *adolescence* as a developmental period of transition from childhood to adulthood that typically begins in middle school or junior high (around 10 to 13 years of age) and ends in the late teens. The transition involves a range of biological, cognitive, and socioemotional changes (Santrock, 2015, p. 16).

**Parenting Services, Family Support Services, Fathering Services**

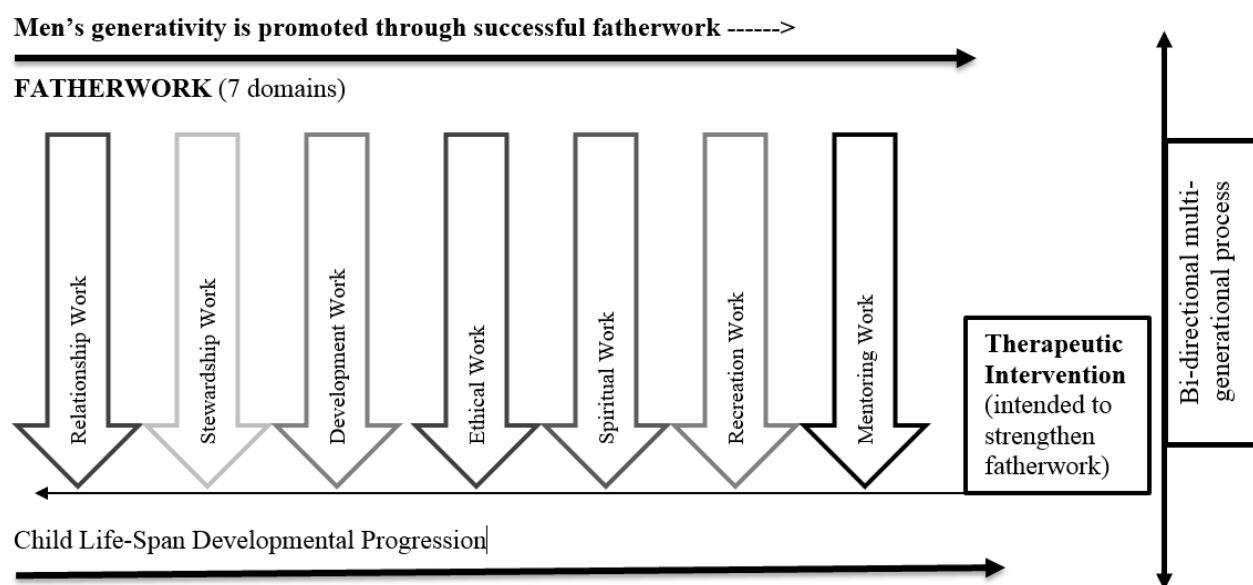
The broad range of settings and services that exist to promote improved family functioning necessitates some generalization of terminology. While the term *family support services* is the most inclusive (Fletcher & Visser, 2008), more specific terminology, such as *parenting services* and *fathering services*, denotes interventions or approaches that are targeted to specific members or relationships within the family system (Berlyn et al., 2008).



### **Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is found in the conceptual ethic of generative fathering. This conceptual ethic was introduced in the background section of this chapter, but because it serves as an organizing framework for the study, it is more fully explicated here.

The conceptual ethic of generative fathering informed the present study in a number of ways. First, the model's overwhelmingly positive view of fathers and fathering is embraced as a necessary counter to the role inadequacy perspective (RIP) that has characterized much of the research in this field (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998). Successful fatherwork is understood to promote the development of children while at the same time contributing to the positive adjustment and growth of fathers. The developmental orientation of the generative fathering framework provides a basis for identifying specific fatherwork behaviors that can and should be promoted at various stages of child development. Because it focused on the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, this study paid particular attention to the fathering behaviors—or fatherwork—that most directly linked with this developmental stage. Finally, in recognition of the fact that the generative fathering framework provides an ethic or ideal for fathering, the specific behaviors associated with successful fatherwork may be seen as overall goals for any family interventions in which fathers are involved. Figure 1.1 depicts a model of the proposed relationship between the generative fathering framework and fathering interventions.

**Figure 1.1.** Father Life-Span Developmental Progression

### Summary

This chapter builds a case for this study by providing background to the topic, including a survey of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, challenges to the relationship, the inadequacy of services currently available to promote the relationship, and an articulation of the generative fathering conceptual ethic as a useful framework for understanding and promoting father involvement. This background highlights the need for an enriched understanding of fathers' experiences, particularly as they encounter difficulties in relationships with their adolescent daughters and seek out supports for these relationships. A qualitative heuristic design was presented as the preferred method for obtaining a meaningful understanding of the experiences of help-seeking fathers, and a statement followed about the study's potential significance for a number of interested parties. This chapter also included the researcher's interest in the topic, along with an acknowledgement of both assumptions and limitations to the study because these factors influenced the selection of the research approach and the overall

orientation of the study. Finally, this chapter sought to bring clarity to the study by identifying the specific research questions that it hopes to answer, defining key terms, and tying this information together with an integrated conceptual framework to serve as a foundation for the study.

### **Organization of the Remaining Chapters**

The next chapter builds upon the survey of research that was covered in the “Background” section of Chapter One. This fuller treatment of the empirical research on fathering provides a comprehensive overview of the subject, furthering the case for both the importance and relevance of this study. Chapter Three expands the discussion of the study’s research design by elaborating on the theoretical and conceptual framework that was employed. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study, and Chapter Five summarizes the conclusions of the study, considers the implications of this study’s findings, and provides recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To further demonstrate the potential value of this study, this chapter will survey a broad array of literature that is relevant to the relationship between fathers and adolescent daughters. Because the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of a select group of help-seeking fathers, a comprehensive understanding of the critical factors that influence the phenomenon of fathering is necessary for contextualizing their experiences. Toward that end, this chapter will provide a synthesis of literature on the following topics: the context within which fathering takes place, female adolescent development, the importance of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, interventions that target this relationship, the Abba fathering groups, and support for the qualitative heuristic methodology that this study will employ. Recognizing that the father/adolescent-daughter relationship remains a developing area of study, this review will incorporate broader literature on the phenomenon of fathering where narrower findings are not available.

Various iterations of the following search query were used to identify literature that is relevant to the topic of fathering an adolescent daughter: (father\* OR paternal) AND (daughter OR girl OR female OR adolescen\* OR teen\* OR high school) AND (counsel\* OR therap\* OR psyc\* OR relationship\* OR attach\* OR bond). The results generated from this query allowed for an identification of terms that were most pertinent to the narrowing focus of the study—specifically, the following terms were noted as providing access to the body of literature that most closely relates to the study's focus and conceptual framework: generative fathering, fatherwork, engaging men in therapy, parenting/fathering support services, The Abba Project, and qualitative/heuristic fathering research. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the topic of fathering, these search terms were submitted through EBSCO academic search complete, with

the understanding that the most current and relevant studies would be prioritized for review. To ensure that pertinent studies were not lost in this broad-based search, the same search terms were run through the additional search engines of APA PsycNet™, PsycTherapy™, Gale Academic OneFile™, ProQuest Central™, PsycInfo™, and Google Scholar. These queries were further supplemented by a survey of reference lists from key studies and a review of recent books that contain a scholarly review of the topic of fathering.

The literature review process outlined above identified a notable trend in the literature on fathering: a particular lack of studies that focus on the perspectives and experiences associated with parenting an adolescent child. Whereas there is ample literature relating to accounts from and variables related to parents of children, the perspectives of the children themselves generally only begin to emerge once those children reach late adolescence and adulthood. Where they occur, the reports from these children are largely drawn from convenience samples of college students. Studies on interventions with fathers of adolescent daughters were virtually nonexistent. This gap in the literature begs the question of whether or not important perspectives are adequately captured by the current body of parenting literature. More than that, it points to the need for further study of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship.

### **Context of Fathering**

The phenomenon of fathering does not occur in a vacuum. Men's relationship with their work and their relationship with the larger family system have a significant impact on their availability for and investment in the fathering role. For that reason, it is essential to understand the multiple ways in which these contexts shape and interact with men's fathering engagement. In the section that follows, fathering will be considered within the larger domains of work and

family, with special attention being given to the central importance of mothers as mediators of numerous dimensions of paternal involvement.

### **Fathers, Mothers, and the Parental Relationship**

Family relationships, whether between parenting partners or between siblings and extended family, have a distinct influence on the relational dynamics that exist between a father and his daughter (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Cabrera, 2012). There is a robust body of research indicating that the fathering role can be strongly contingent upon the behaviors and attitudes of the child's mother (Allen & Daly, 2007; De Luccie, 1995; Wenk et al., 1994). The reality of the interconnectedness of parental roles makes a review of the coparenting relationship essential to an understanding of the phenomenon of fathering. In keeping with this study's emphasis, the focus in this section will be squarely upon how the relationship between parents can impact a father's involvement with his children.

In his review of the literature in 1997, Pleck found that fathers' relational availability to their children was about two-thirds that of mothers. More recent cultural developments may be shifting that balance in a more egalitarian direction. According to Nielsen (2007), the increasing phenomenon of dual-earner households has coincided with a discovery that fathers are spending more time with their children than in previous generations. A more recent review by Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, and Dusch (2013) supports Nielsen's earlier finding that parenting responsibilities are more equitably distributed between parents in dual-earner households.

In the literature on fatherhood, mothers have often been identified as "gatekeepers" to the father-child relationship (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Dorbusch et al., 1985). Maternal gatekeeping refers to the theory that mothers regulate paternal access or involvement with children through a variety of behavioral and attitudinal mechanisms (De Luccie, 1995). This term was originally

used to refer to the physical access nonresident fathers are given to their children, but it has increasingly been used to refer to broader father-mother dynamics. Allen and Hawkins (1999) define maternal gatekeeping as “a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in families by limiting men’s opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children” (p. 200). Allen and Hawkins conducted a study of 622 working mothers from dual-earner households and found that those who held beliefs that were consistent with a gatekeeping perspective (rigid gender-specific roles that are reflected in a reluctance to relinquish caregiving responsibilities, external validation for their mothering role, and differential conceptions of their family role) were likely to be involved in less equitable caregiving relationships. Mothers who held gatekeeping beliefs tended to carry a larger share of the parenting workload, spending roughly 5 hours more in direct caregiving than non-gatekeeping mothers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

Mothers’ beliefs about fathers’ competence and the behaviors that flow from these beliefs can have a direct impact on fathers’ own sense of competency and on the amount of time that fathers spend with their children. Using path analysis to analyze results from a quantitative study of 30 resident and 72 nonresident fathers, Fagan and Barnett (2003) found that mothers’ gatekeeping beliefs were directly and indirectly associated with ratings of paternal competence and were causally linked to levels of paternal involvement. Whereas mothers’ relationships with their children generally operate independently, fathers remain somewhat dependent upon mothers for relational access to their children (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). According to Townsend (2002), fathers tend to view the family as a unit, interpreting their roles of husband and father as being contingent upon one another. Because of this, marital conflict can have a significant impact on the relationship between fathers and children, with fathers withdrawing

from children as well as mothers when marital conflict is high (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998). The effects of early childhood conflict between parents may not be long-lasting, however. Using national data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey—Birth Cohort, Fagan and Cabrera (2012) looked at reciprocal and longitudinal effects of conflict between parents. Fagan and Cabrera noted that ratings at 9 months were predictive of decreased father engagement at 24 and 48 months but not significantly predictive of involvement in later childhood.

Pleck and Hofferth (2008) conducted a longitudinal study using self-report data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to examine the relationship between maternal and paternal involvement with children aged 10-14. With this age group, a reciprocal relationship between maternal and paternal involvement occurred, with maternal involvement both predicting levels of paternal involvement and mediating the effect of marital conflict. Pleck and Hofferth concluded that the mediating role of maternal involvement must be factored into models of paternal involvement in order to avoid overestimating the extent to which marital conflict is seen as tempering paternal involvement. Of special relevance to the present study, Pleck and Hofferth identified a need for further study on paternal involvement with adolescent children.

Krampe and Newton (2006) used quantitative correlational methods and factor analysis for a study on adult children's perceptions of paternal presence. The authors found that the quality of the father-mother relationship is related to children's perceptions of the father—with children taking a primary cue from the attitude of the mother in forming their own views toward the father. Similarly, Krampe and Newton found that fathers tended to show higher levels of involvement and place greater importance on the father role when they perceived that their wives



gave a positive rating to their fathering. A study conducted by Pasley, Futris, and Skinner (2002) with 186 fathers in first marriages focused on the commitment and psychological centrality of the fathering role for men. Using a series of measures, including affective commitment, interactional commitment, role performance, and psychological centrality, Pasley et al. assessed the relative strength of men's affiliation with and commitment to their role as fathers. The measures associated with these factors were moderated in their relationship to fathers' frequency of involvement by the men's perception of their role performance. Because of this, fathers seemed to be particularly sensitive to the attitudes and beliefs that their wives had toward their parenting competence (Pasley et al., 2002). This finding holds direct implications for educators and family service workers who seek to promote paternal involvement.

Moving beyond the potential impact of maternal gatekeeping, it is useful to consider the various ways in which mothering and fathering interact more broadly. Investigators have looked into the relative influence that fathers and mothers exert over their children's development. Wenk et al. (1994) used regression techniques to analyze data from the National Survey of Children ( $N = 762$ ) in comparing maternal and paternal involvement on the well-being of child and adolescent sons and daughters. Their overall conclusion was that the ongoing relationship with each parent was closely related to adolescent ratings of well-being. In fact, fathers' ongoing relationship to their children was more predictive of adolescent well-being than were ratings of father presence during childhood (Wenk et al., 1994).

Although the involvement of both mothers and fathers is important for children, there is reason to believe that they tend to be involved in very different parenting behaviors. In his summary review of recent research on parenting, Lamb (2010) identified a key difference in the contribution that each parent makes to the development of their children: While mothers are

generally seen as caregivers, fathers are often behaviorally defined as playmates. Fathers, more so than mothers, tend to bond with their children around shared activities, including play, learning, and working together (Brotherson et al., 2005; Way & Gillman, 2000). Though traditional conceptions of parenting (i.e., nurturance and direct caregiving) have often minimized this unique contribution, numerous studies have identified distinct benefits that accrue to children from their times of playful paternal interaction (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Pleck, 2007). As an example of this, a correlational study by Culp, Schadle, Robinson, and Culp (2000) conducted with 25 parents of kindergartners found that paternal play was associated with decreased rates of child behavioral problems and increased ratings of perceived self-confidence.

Nielsen (2007) found that college-aged daughters' relationships with their mothers were more enduring and more meaningful than were their relationships with their fathers, as seen in daughters' reports of spending more time with their mothers, feeling more emotionally close with their mothers, communicating more comfortably with their mothers, and feeling that they know and are known better by their mothers. Bengtson, Biblarz, Giarrusso, Richlin-Klonsky, and Silverstein (2000) reported that although bonds between mothers and children tend to grow stronger over time, father-child bonds do not. This finding is of particular relevance to the present study in that it implicates adolescence as a time when the gulf between a girl's relationships with her mother and her father may begin to widen. While the paternal relationship often remains secondary to that of the mother for girls, Barber and Thomas (1986) found that fathers show more physical affection and sustained contact with their daughters than they do with their sons. The enduring value of this can be seen in Barber and Thomas's finding that daughters' self-esteem is best predicted by companionship with mothers and by physical affection from fathers.

In summarizing this review of fathering in the context of family, it is important to reiterate that fathers and mothers are not rivals. Rather, the parenting relationship can be understood as a complex system of interactions in which mothers and fathers each make a unique contribution to the development and well-being of their children. Although paternal involvement does often seem to be contingent upon the behaviors and attitudes of mothers, fathers retain a unique and important role in shaping the lives of their children. One primary way that they do that is by providing financial support to the family.

### **Fatherwork and Work**

Recognizing the importance that work plays in most men's lives, Brotherson et al. (2005) suggest the concept of fatherwork as a more inclusive and accurate description of fathering engagement. Drawing from a generative fathering framework, the authors present the idea of fatherwork as a replacement for the prevailing metaphor that sees fathering merely as a role that men play (Dollahite et al., 1997). In so doing, Brotherson et al. affirm the centrality of fathering in men's lives and assert that it is morally inseparable from a man's identity and larger life calling. With that in mind, this section will consider the place that paid employment can have in the broader expression of men's fatherwork.

Earlier cultural conceptions of fatherhood saw "breadwinning," or providing for the material needs of the family, as the primary, if not exclusive, expression of paternal responsibility (Lamb, 2010; Snarey, 1993). In keeping with this, Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998) developed their model of responsible fathering around the imperatives of establishing paternity, materially providing for children, and maintaining emotional and physical care throughout children's lives. While conceptions of fatherhood have expanded to include dimensions of nurturance (involvement in caregiving activities) and engagement (direct, active

interaction with children), the need to provide remains. Consistent with the encompassing model of fathering that has been put forward by the generative fathering framework, Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) lament the fact that the role of providing for the family has been largely left out of more recent conceptions of paternal involvement. In addition, these authors note a trend whereby men who do not economically provide for their families are also likely to disengage from involvement in other areas of their children's lives.

Fatherhood can actually provide a benefit to men in their work settings. Men who are actively engaged as fathers tend to be more committed and productive in their employment (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001), and emotional involvement with children has been found to act as a buffer against work-related stresses (Barnett & Gareis, 2006). At the same time, men report that work-related obligations, including irregular schedules and longer work hours, are a significant barrier to greater involvement with children and a major source of stress as they strive to establish a balance between family and work (Milkie & Peltola, 1999). All work is not the same, of course. The work that men do and the settings in which they do it can make a profound difference for the family. Goodman, Crouter, Lanza, and Cox (2008) conducted a study of 446 rural and low-income fathers that included interviews, home visits, and videotaped observations of father-infant interactions. The purpose of the study was to explore how occupational conditions impacted a father's interaction with his infant child(ren). The authors found that less supportive work environments (those with lower levels of self-direction and greater job-related stress) were associated with decreases in paternal engagement and lower levels of sensitive parenting.

Supervisor support and work pressure were also the focus of a study by Ransford, Crouter, and McHale (2008), who examined how these variables impact psychosocial

functioning and relational connectedness between working parents and their adolescent children. This study was unique in that it examined the impact of work variables on the entire family unit for dual-earner households. This innovation was important as previous studies have tended to look at individual family members and so were unlikely to account for the complex work-family dynamics that come into play with families where both parents are employed—a phenomenon that is increasingly common among American families (Kotila, 2013). Ransford et al. assessed work pressure and supervisor support using self-report Likert scale ratings and then compared these variables with the following psychosocial variables: role overload, marital love, marital satisfaction, parent-adolescent conflict, adolescent intimacy, and parent and adolescent depressive symptoms. Ransford et al. conducted repeated-measure ANOVA analysis to maintain the parental/adolescent dyad as the level of analysis while allowing for an exploration of within-couple differences. Subsequently, Ransford et al. ran a series of ANCOVAs which treated each family grouping as a single unit. The results of these analyses supported the following conclusion: Husbands' perception of higher work pressure and lower support were associated with higher levels of depression in husbands and wives (Ransford et al., 2008). Digging into this data, fathers specifically reported feelings of anxiety, guilt, and depression when they perceived that their work kept them from fulfilling family-role responsibilities. High work pressure and low supervisor support showed only a mild positive correlation with adolescent depression. Adolescent conflict was highest in those families where both mothers and fathers were employed in high-risk settings (high pressure and low supervisor support). Overall, the study showed high-risk work settings were associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction, higher levels of adolescent conflict, and lower intimacy with adolescent children (Ransford et al., 2008).

Recognizing the importance of workplace support for parenting, it is unsurprising to find that family-supportive public policies, particularly with regard to family leave, can have a significant impact on men's family involvement and overall well-being. The nation of Sweden is a frequent setting for studies on parental leave due to its generous policies in this area. During the first 15 months of a child's life, Swedish policy allows parents a combined 480 days away from work at a rate of 80% of their pay (Wells & Sarkadi, 2012). It is notable that this very egalitarian policy does not distinguish between mothers and fathers but simply allots 480 total days for them to disseminate between themselves. For a number of reasons, both practical and financial, fathers tend to use significantly less of the total allotted hours than mothers (Wells & Sarkadi, 2012). Nevertheless, Wells and Sarkadi (2012) credited this flexible leave policy with marginal increases in overall paternal involvement and specifically with increasing fathers' attendance at Child Health Centers—national centers that support the health and development of children and provide parents with early parenting education.

The importance of family leave policies can be demonstrated by comparing Sweden with other nations where parental leave policies are vastly different. Feldman and Gran (2016) compared the paternal leave policies of 44 nations and concluded that countries that offer leave of multiple weeks specifically to fathers were strongly linked to higher rates of father-infant involvement. A similar study compared parental leave policies for 21 high-income countries (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2009). Among other findings, the authors noted that nations where parental leave policies were most generous, and where family leave was not transferrable between parents, showed more gender equity in terms of parental gender roles (less of a stark division between mothers as "caregivers" and fathers as "providers"). Interestingly, the United States was ranked 20th out of 21 countries based on measures of generosity for parental leave.

This section reviewed coparenting relationships and paid employment as significant factors that can impact men's fathering behavior. The role of maternal gatekeeping (mothers' overall attitudes and behaviors) was noted as an important influence on father involvement. Paid work was placed within the broader conceptual framework of fatherwork to help identify the ways in which the responsibility for material provision can impact men's fathering. Finally, the relationship between family leave policies and paternal involvement was briefly surveyed.

### **Research Support for the Importance of the Father-Daughter Relationship**

This section will review a number of areas that bear directly upon the father/adolescent-daughter relationship. First, studies relating to female adolescence will serve to highlight the developmental and relational challenges that confront both fathers and daughters during this transitional stage. Next, this section covers specific areas where father involvement has been associated with daughters' adjustment and outcomes. The section ends with an exploration of research on the ways that fathering serves to promote men's development and overall generativity.

### **Female Adolescent Development and Fathering**

Chapter One touched upon a number of unique dynamics that may impact the relationship between a father and his daughter once she enters adolescence. This section will expand upon the topic by providing a review of specific areas that are important to the relationship at this stage, giving special attention to the areas of attachment, communication, puberty, and changing relational dynamics that may be ushered in by daughters' progress through adolescence.

**Father/adolescent-daughter attachment.** Early research on attachment focused on the relationship between infants and a single caregiver, with the vast majority of studies conducted

with the child and mother (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969). Early research gave less attention to attachment relationships with both parents or to the attachment of parents to older children. Because children establish attachments with regular caregivers early in life, the relationship between a father and his infant daughter can be seen as shaping the contours that define the subsequent relationship.

Attachment researchers have posited that early interactions with caregivers are fundamental in shaping an individual's *attachment style*. The essential factor is the quality of the relationship rather than the amount of time a child spends with a caregiver. In fact, children who experience low-quality engagement with mothers and fathers show greater levels of attachment insecurity as they spend more time with those parents (Brown, McBride, Shin, & Bost, 2007). Meta-analyses of attachment reveal that infants who experience a consistent caregiving relationship (where needs are understood and met in a timely manner) tend to develop a secure attachment to their proximal caregivers (Bretherton, 2011; Fox, Kimmerly, & Schafer, 1991; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; Lucassen et al., 2011).

Empirical literature reveals that having a secure attachment to more than one caregiver can be particularly beneficial. For example, in their longitudinal study of the association between father involvement and mother-child attachment at age three, Easterbrooks and Goldberg (1990) found that children with more than one secure attachment express less negative emotion and demonstrate greater social competence. Attachment security remains important into late childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood. Adolescents who benefited from multiple secure attachments showed more pro-social behavior and greater self-confidence (Carter & Almaraz, 2014), higher levels of overall competence (Booth-LaForce, Rubin, Rose-Krasnor, &



Burgess, 2004), and rated higher on indicators of positive friendship qualities (Lieberman et al., 1999).

Focusing specifically on fathers and attachment, Wong, Mangelsdorf, Brown, Neff, and Schoppe-Sullivan (2009) used quantitative methods to examine the correlation between parental beliefs about the importance of paternal caregiving, infant temperament, and children's attachment security. The authors found that fathers' beliefs about their importance to their children were predictive of a secure attachment. Palm (2014) conducted a review of empirical literature on father attachment and found that measures of paternal sensitivity to children's needs and synchrony of responses were associated with higher ratings of attachment security. Providing some insight into the basis of this association, Lundy (2002) identified "mind-mindedness," or an ability to recognize how a child is feeling or thinking, as a critical factor in promoting highly attuned and synchronous engagement. Given the lingering importance of the attachment relationship, interventions that target the father/adolescent-daughter relationship should explore ways of enhancing both the sensitivity and the synchrony of ongoing paternal engagement.

Freeman and Almond (2010) used a mixed methods approach to examine the implications of paternal attachment for young adults' romantic relationships. Freeman and Almond found that daughters who considered their father to be their principal source of attachment support (roughly 10% of the sample of 1,012 participants) were less likely to be sexually involved with their partners. Qualitative interviews with daughters who provided high ratings for measures of paternal support consistently emphasized themes related to positive communication. More specifically, mutual respect and an ability to resolve disagreements

through open dialogue were reported as contributing to perceptions of high support from fathers (Freeman & Almond, 2010).

**Father/adolescent-daughter communication.** The connection between attachment and communication may take on special importance as children enter into adolescence. This assertion is based, in part, on developmental realities. In contrast with younger children, adolescents show a marked increase in verbal ability, which enables them to express their growing sense of self in more direct and sophisticated ways. This increase in verbal ability coincides with the budding push for independence that characterizes the adolescent transition. For all of these reasons, communication between an adolescent daughter and her father holds potential for both deepening connection and escalating conflict.

Punyanunt-Carter (2007) sought to bridge the gap between communication and attachment theory by examining the ways that communication motives between fathers and daughters are expressed across varying attachment styles. The assumption that individuals pursue communication for a variety of specific purposes provides the premise of communication motive theory (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988). Rubin et al. identified six specific communication motives: control motives (means to gain compliance), relaxation motives (ways to rest or relax), escape motives (seeking diversion or avoidance of other activities), inclusion motives (ways of facilitating a link with the other by expressing emotion), affection motives (ways to express love and care for the other), and pleasure motives (communication for pleasure or excitement). Communication motives have a significant impact on an individual's perception of and satisfaction with a relationship, and it is notable that particular patterns have been seen in the communication motives of fathers and daughters. The most significant finding in the study by Punyanunt-Carter was that securely attached daughters were much more likely to show an

escape motivation in their communication with their fathers than were their insecure peers. In this study of 250 female undergraduates and their fathers, 53% of daughters rated as securely attached. The author contends that higher rates of escape motivation on the part of securely attached daughters were indicative of a willingness to use the father as a means for alleviating stress and seeking reassurance. Interestingly, no difference was seen in fathers' communication motives on the dimension of daughters' attachment styles, though fathers did show a pattern of engaging in more instrumental rather than expressive communication overall (Punyanunt-Carter, 2007).

This last finding is more fully explicated in another study by the same author that looked at relationship maintenance behaviors between daughters and fathers (Punyanunt-Carter, 2006). In this study, the extent to which fathers showed a preference for instrumental engagement was evident in their higher use of behaviors such as conflict management, shared tasks, and advice. Daughters showed a preference for more expressive behaviors, such as assurances and positivity (Punyanunt-Carter, 2006). Although fathers and daughters each used a full range of relationship maintenance behaviors, the differences in their preferences were instructive. To some extent, these differences may be a reflection of gender socialization or of the different responsibilities inherent in the parental and child roles. Whatever their cause, the discrepancy in relationship maintenance behaviors between fathers and daughters can be seen as a reflection of the lack of synchrony that was mentioned earlier as a barrier to greater interpersonal connection.

Drawing on 15 years of data collected from undergraduate young-adult women ( $N = 423$ ), Nielsen (2007) found that communication with fathers was a regular area of frustration for daughters. Because participants in this sample were close to adolescence, they can be seen as a useful group from which to gather information on the father/adolescent-daughter relationship.

Nielsen reported that almost 80% of daughters in the study reported that they wanted to communicate better with their fathers. Specifically, they wanted this communication to be more comfortable, more honest, and more personal. Daughters wished that their fathers would reveal more about their own lives and experiences so that they could get to know them more fully as equals. They saw the overuse of advice giving and negative messages related to money and personal lifestyle as significant barriers to open communication. More than half of the daughters were found to engage in communication with fathers by way of their mothers; Nielson described this as using the mother as a “communication satellite.”

Further supporting this pattern, Fingerman, Witeman, and Ditterer (2010) found that daughters tend to be more comfortable communicating with their mothers than with their fathers during adolescence and early adulthood—sharing with them in a more open way about a wider range of personal topics. This preference persists even into old age, as mothers receive more attention and assistance from their daughters than do fathers (Lin, 2008). One explanation for daughters’ greater openness with mothers might be seen in their concern that fathers could respond in critical or disapproving ways to certain personal disclosures (Matthews, Derlega, & Morrow, 2006). Specifically, daughters showed a reluctance to talk with their fathers about issues of sexuality, psychological problems, self-esteem issues, and moral or legal issues. Another study of communication between sons and daughters with each parent reflects a similar concern on the part of daughters (Miller & Lee, 2001): More than any other parent-child pairing, daughters were most concerned about disappointing their fathers by communicating about topics such as sexual decisions, poor school performance, irresponsible behavior, or disclosures that might be perceived as disrespectful toward family members. Discomfort with communication on

topics related to sexuality was a consistent finding and is something that will be more directly covered in a later section of this chapter.

Much of this section has looked at daughters' preferences and tendencies in their communication with fathers. A study by Schock and Gavazzi (2005) helps to shed some light on the other side of this relationship by exploring the accounts of fathers who express concern about their ability to communicate with their adolescent daughters. This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to elicit information from fathers about areas of uncertainty in the parental role. Fathers in the study consistently identified communication barriers related to both style and conversational topics. With regard to style, fathers indicated that they felt unprepared to connect with their daughters in a sensitive and attuned manner. Topics of special concern related to what fathers called "female issues"—a category which covered topics such as menstruation, dating, body image, and sexual behavior. One promising theme was detected in these fathers' reports: They consistently indicated a desire to improve their ability to talk with their daughters about a wide range of personal matters (Schock & Gavazzi, 2005).

To summarize, open and attuned communication between fathers and daughters is essential to the establishment and maintenance of a meaningful relationship. Yet, as the literature makes clear, communication between fathers and adolescent daughters is subject to a number of identified challenges. Among these are a lack of synchrony between communication motives and communication-based relationship maintenance behaviors, daughters' preference for disclosing personal information to mothers, daughters' fear of judgment or disappointment when disclosing personal information to fathers, and a lack of preparedness on the part of fathers when it comes to openly engaging with daughters on complex or challenging topics. For all of these reasons, interventions that are designed to promote this relationship will need to address the issue

of communication in a direct and practical way, possibly even through structured activities where the express purpose is to promote dialogue on sensitive but meaningful personal topics. To do this, fathers will need to be primed to maintain a nonjudgmental posture as they strive to gain an understanding of their daughters' developing sense of self and their daughters' views about the world they inhabit.

**Puberty and the father/adolescent-daughter relationship.** While adolescence is not strictly defined by the onset of puberty, the changes that accompany this transition are a major marker of girls' maturation into womanhood. The physical changes associated with puberty can lead to self-consciousness, comparison with peers, and concerns about physical appearance (Greene, 2005). Because these changes can also impact how parents and society view them, girls are likely to take cues from those around them as they seek to understand the broader implications of their bodily changes.

Flaake (2005) conducted a qualitative study of adolescent girls, their mothers, and their fathers in order to gain an understanding of how family dynamics can be impacted by girls' entrance into puberty. The author found that girls' self-perceptions around issues of bodily changes were meaningfully developed through interactions with both maternal and paternal caregivers. Perhaps as a reflection of their own insecurities, fathers frequently took a humorous or relaxed approach in communicating about their daughters' changing bodies. While such communications were intended as a lighthearted way of acknowledging an important developmental change, the daughters reported that these types of comments could be both hurtful and embarrassing. Flaake observed another problematic approach by fathers in what some fathers described as a tendency to draw back from relational engagement once girls begin to show signs of sexual development. Flaake explained that this pulling back is most evident in

fathers' withdrawal from close physical contact, even when it had been a normal part of the relationship up to that point. Girls may perceive this change in the relationship as a sign that something is wrong with their developing bodies—leading to mixed feelings about pubertal changes and lingering shame or uncertainty (Flaake, 2005).

It is worth recognizing that the age of onset for puberty for girls can be influenced by the physical presence or absence of a father. Using retrospective reports on data from a national probability sample ( $N = 1921$ ), Bogaert (2005) found that daughters who did not live with their father showed an earlier onset for puberty (menarche and development of breasts and other secondary sex characteristics). A prospective study by Deardorff et al. (2011) noted that ethnic and socioeconomic variables may play a role in moderating the relationship between father absence and early puberty. Deardorff et al. found that African American girls and girls from higher-income households showed the strongest relationship between father absence and early maturation.

While a number of theories have been suggested to explain the relationship between father presence and the age of onset for puberty in girls, the impact, rather than the cause of this relationship, is most pertinent to the present study. Early maturation can be a significant risk factor for girls across a number of dimensions, including earlier initiation of sexual activity (Marino, Skinner, Doherty, Rosenthal, Cooper-Robbins, & Hickey, 2013), higher rates of teenage pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2003), and increased incidence of problem behaviors (Mrug et al., 2014). The study by Marino et al. used a longitudinal design ( $N = 554$ ) to track a birth cohort of girls through age 20. The median age at menarche (AAM) was 12.8 and the median age for first sexual intercourse (FSI) was 16. Girls who showed early AAM initiated FSI roughly one year earlier than their peers. Looking below the surface of the data can be illustrative: About

one-quarter of the girls in the early AAM group had their FSI before age 15, whereas none of the girls in the late AAM group had FSI before age 14 (Marino et al., 2013). While this difference may not seem drastic, it is important to recognize that sexual development is happening alongside of important changes in emotional, mental, and psychological development. Girls whose FSI is skewed toward the younger range are less likely to be prepared for both the risks and the complexities that may accompany sexual involvement—a consideration that serves to highlight the importance of parents as guides and resources to adolescents who are navigating early puberty and sexual development (Marino et al., 2013).

Fathers play a special role in the sexual socialization of their daughters. In general, open communication between parents and daughters on issues of sexuality is associated with lower occurrence of risky sexual behaviors (Way & Gillman, 2000). Daughters have been found to communicate more openly with their mothers about topics related to sex, although they also express a desire for the type of input that their fathers can provide (Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011). Using a mixed method design that allowed for both statistical analysis and open dialogue with adolescent girls, Hutchinson and Cedarbaum (2011) noted that less than 10% of daughters believed that their fathers prepared them well for issues of dating and sexuality, while 80% of daughters indicated that their fathers could have contributed more to their sexual socialization. Specifically, Hutchinson and Cedarbaum found that daughters wanted more information from their fathers in the areas of providing insights and understanding about men; demonstrating and modeling openness and comfort with sexual communication; and providing more information about specific sexual topics, family values, and expectations.

**Changes in the relationship during adolescence.** One final area to explore in this section is the strain that may enter into the father-daughter relationship during adolescence.



Conflict is normal, although it is not a necessary feature of the individuation process as young people move from relative dependence toward increasing independence. Placing this developmental process within the larger contours of the parent-adolescent relationship can be instructive. Parents and children may differ in terms of the conflict resolution styles that they employ during the child's adolescence (Van Doorn, Branje, & Meeus, 2011). Examining the use of three conflict resolution styles—positive problem solving, conflict engagement, and withdrawal—Van Doorn et al. (2011) conducted a four-wave longitudinal study with both parents and adolescents. The study's purpose was to identify which conflict resolution approaches were primary for each group at different times during adolescence. Van Doorn et al. found no consistent interactive effects between the gender of children and parents, so children were analyzed as a group. Adolescents increased their use of positive problem solving with mothers across time, but showed little change on this dimension with fathers. Conflict engagement by adolescents remained constant with fathers, but showed a curvilinear relationship for mothers—increasing between Time 1 and Time 2, and then decreasing between Time 2 and Time 4. The use of conflict engagement by both mothers and fathers significantly decreased over time. Finally, Van Doorn et al. found that adolescents showed a greater use of withdrawal to manage conflict with their parents. Importantly, this increased use of withdrawal leveled off with mothers but remained high with fathers. Fathers, in contrast with mothers, showed a marked increase in use of withdrawal during their children's early to middle adolescence (Van Doorn et al., 2011).

Placing the issue of relational conflict within the larger developmental picture, Proulx and Helms (2008) conducted interviews with 142 dyads of parents of young adult daughters to gain an understanding of these parents' perceptions of the continuity and change in the

relationship. This qualitative study supported the notion that the adolescent transition is characterized less by “adolescent-driven development and relational separation” than by shifting relational transformations that require continual negotiation and renegotiation (Proulx & Helms, 2008, p. 237). Adolescence is best understood as a period marked by both continuity and change. Change is evident in the fact that adolescents become more independent from parents, meaning they require less daily caregiving. Continuity, on the other hand, is expressed through enduring emotional bonds—bonds that both persist and deepen as adolescents develop. Proulx and Helms (2008) found that by the time children reached young adulthood, parents tended to describe their role as that of a mentor or peer. Interestingly, fathers were found to disclose more and offer more advice to their sons than their daughters. In addition, more fathers than mothers reported a decrease in contact and time spent with daughters (18% versus 9%). Proulx and Helms’s findings are consistent with the earlier reported study by Van Doorn et al. (2011) that noted a growing discrepancy in paternal involvement along gendered lines as children move into adolescence and adulthood.

Approaching the parent-child relationship from the other side, De Goede, Branje, and Meeus (2009) conducted a 4-wave longitudinal study ( $N = 951$ ) with early and middle adolescents to gain an understanding of how they perceive their relationships with their parents. This study identified the major themes of support, conflict, power, and gender differences as important variables in the parent-adolescent relationship. Support, characterized by intimacy and warmth, was perceived by adolescents to decrease during early adolescence and to increase during middle and late adolescence. Similarly, conflict increased during early adolescence—a time of peak pubertal development—and stabilized during middle and late adolescence. De Goede et al. (2009) found that this pattern also held for adolescents’ perception of their power in

the relationship. Study participants felt that their power decreased during pre-adolescence and early adolescence, stabilized during middle adolescence, and increased during late adolescence. Findings related to gender differences were mixed and did not rise to a level of statistical significance. Given the converging trends between perceptions of support, conflict, and power in this study, it is unsurprising to note that a significant correlation existed between each of these variables. By late adolescence, the parent-child relationship tended to move in the direction of a more egalitarian and settled arrangement (De Goede et al., 2009).

### **Specific Areas of Importance**

In the preceding section, passing reference was made to the distinct benefits that can accrue to a daughter when she experiences meaningful involvement from her father. Research in this area has identified a number of specific areas where paternal involvement can be particularly important for girls. This section will survey this literature by examining empirical studies on fathers' impact on daughters' adjustment and outcomes in the following areas: self-esteem or self-image; mental, emotional, and behavioral health; overall well-being; academic and occupational achievement; and romantic and/or opposite-sex relationships.

**Self-esteem and self-image.** Although the need for self-definition is something that occurs throughout the lifespan, adolescence and early adulthood are recognized as times where conceptions of self are likely to experience significant revision and hardening. Children's self-concepts are fundamentally shaped by their interactions with parents and by the environment of the home in which they are raised (Denissen, Van Aken, & Roberts, 2011; Schwartz, Klimstra, Luyckx, Hale, & Meeus, 2012). Daughters who have had positive fathering experiences usually have greater self-confidence, higher levels of self-esteem, and are more self-reliant than their poorly fathered peers (Finley & Schwartz, 2004; Lamb, 1997; Morgan & Wilcoxon, 1998).

Crocetti et al. (2015) conducted a six-wave longitudinal study ( $N = 497$  families) with mothers, fathers, and adolescent children with the goal of understanding the processes by which intergenerational self-concepts are developed and transmitted. Self-concept clarity (SCC) is understood as a continuum along which individuals can be measured in terms of the coherence and continuity of their personal self-concept. Overall, the study found that SCC was transmitted unidirectionally (from parents to children) and that greater parental SCC was associated with higher levels of adolescent SCC. Parents who showed high initial scores on the measure of SCC tended to see the greatest increase in SCC levels among their children. This may be interpreted to mean that parents with the most secure and stable sense of self were best able to facilitate the development of these traits in their children. Crocetti et al. reported no statistically significant finding in terms of the influence of parent gender on SCC among sons and daughters, though the authors note that paternal influence was equal to that of mothers in its impact on the SCC of children of both genders.

Beyond helping to shape their daughters' self-concept or self-image, quality fathering has been linked with higher levels of self-esteem in girls. An early but important study by Mori (1999) found that one of the best predictors of girls' self-esteem was the degree of punitiveness and control exerted by their fathers. The association was particularly strong for girls who were in middle school. Although a correlation remained into high school, it did show some leveling. A positive correlation was also seen between measures of paternal care and daughters' scores on measures of self-esteem and comfort with femininity. In support of this latter finding, care, or warmth, by fathers was associated with higher levels of self-esteem and greater comfort with womanhood in young women (Scheffler & Nauss, 1999). This study by Scheffler and Nauss (1999), conducted with 57 female university students, investigated the relationship between

fatherly affirmation and women's self-esteem. Scheffler and Nauss found that participants' self-esteem showed a positive relationship to their perceptions of paternal affection (Pearson's  $r = .64$ ).

Looking at the specific parental behaviors that contribute to adolescents' self-esteem can provide additional insight. In an early but widely cited study, Wenk et al. (1994) examined dimensions of behavioral and emotional involvement by parents and found a general pattern wherein behavioral components were more important for boys and emotional involvement made more of a difference for girls. Boys tended to gain self-esteem from achievement activities, whereas girls' self-esteem came from a sense of social and moral acceptability (feeling close to and loved by parents). Wenk et al. also found that feeling close to one's father can have a positive effect on a girl's self-esteem and life satisfaction, while girls' perception of paternal care was associated with better overall mental health.

Developing and maintaining a healthy body image may be a particular challenge for girls during adolescence. Fathers' attitudes and interactions with their daughters are an important factor in helping girls establish a positive self-image. Researchers have long noted an association between paternal factors and rates of eating pathology in daughters (Botta & Dumlao, 2002; Maine, 2004). In a review of the literature, Fassino et al. (2002) found that daughters with anorexia nervosa (AN) tended to have an unusually strong but stressful attachment to their father. Furthermore, fathers of daughters with AN were more likely to be narcissistic, controlling, perfectionistic, emotionally constricted, and depressed. A qualitative study by Elliot (2010) illustrates the ways in which daughters with disordered eating may view their fathers and themselves. Elliot's study ( $N = 11$ ) used narrative analysis to identify themes in the stories that daughters with AN told about their relationships to their fathers. Prominent themes for the

daughters included a fear of abandonment due to paternal inconsistency or unavailability, close identification with the father (generally more than with the mother), and a developing preoccupation with body image and caloric intake. Because Elliot drew narratives from women who were in an advanced stage of recovery, their narratives also often included mention of healthier relations to their fathers where boundaries were clearer and fathers were increasingly capable of providing stability and support.

Approaching the topic of body image more broadly, Seligman et al. (2013) investigated the relative influence of peers and parents in shaping the body satisfaction of young adults. The survey of 283 college students found that peers were a more powerful influence on conceptions of body image during the formative adolescent years. Comparison with peers most often led to negative body image, with girls reporting a particularly high rate of harsh comparison. Parents did make some contribution to their children's body image, though this seemed to come more indirectly: Higher rates of parental control were associated with lower rates of body satisfaction. Seligman et al. found that control by fathers was the strongest predictor of low body satisfaction for girls.

**Mental, emotional, and behavioral health.** Naturally, there is overlap between the ways that daughters think of themselves and their overall ability to function. Because fathers contribute to their daughters' self-concepts through various means, their impact on daughters' mental, emotional, and behavioral health can be high. Illustrating this connection by way of the topic of eating pathology, Jones et al. (2006) studied the interaction between the father-daughter relationship, daughters' core beliefs, and daughters' eating pathology. Jones et al. found that paternal rearing behaviors significantly mediated eating symptomology in girls—primarily by influencing their core beliefs. Daughters' beliefs about paternal rejection and overprotection

predicted aspects of eating disorders (drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction) by way of core beliefs related to defectiveness/shame, abandonment, and vulnerability to harm. A full 46% of daughters' reported body dissatisfaction was predicted by measures of paternal rejection.

Comparison with the control group led Jones et al. to conclude that paternal protection, or emotional warmth, was associated with decreased vulnerability and a reduced drive for thinness.

A range of other behavioral health problems have also been linked to father involvement. Amato and Rivera (1999) used data from a national sample ( $N = 994$ ) to study the influence of paternal involvement on children's behavioral problems. The study was significant because of its scope and because of the fact that it used both mothers' and fathers' reports of various behavioral and parenting dimensions to avoid self-report bias. The authors found that positive paternal and maternal involvement were significantly and independently related to children's behavior problems. Amato and Rivera reported that father involvement along dimensions of time, support, and closeness all showed a statistically significant negative correlation to behavioral problems in the home and at school.

Paternal involvement also predicts lower levels of criminal involvement for daughters (Schock & Gavazzi, 2005). A study of African American families living in violent neighborhoods ( $N = 66$ ) found that fathers who used spiritual practices in their parenting were more likely to have an authoritative rather than permissive parenting approach (Letiecq, 2007). Authoritative fathering (characterized by warmth, nurturance, consistency, reasoning, and responsiveness) was associated with proactive parenting practices that served to protect children from exposure to and involvement with drugs and other criminal behaviors (Letiecq). Paternal involvement may be especially important for daughters in communities of risk, including those that are characterized by high crime and poverty. Boyd et al. (2006) investigated the impact of

parental relationships on drug refusal self-efficacy for African American adolescent girls ( $N = 155$ ) in urban communities and found that the quality of the father-daughter relationship significantly predicted girls' ability to refuse drugs ( $r = .184, p < .05$ ).

Daughters who feel that they have a close relationship with their fathers are less likely to engage in behaviors such as illicit drug use and sexual risk taking (Rostad, Silverman, & McDonald, 2014). Because this study was conducted with college-aged daughters ( $N = 203$ , average age of 19.2 years) who were largely living outside of the home, it is worthwhile to note that paternal psychological presence was deemed to be the most significant factor in shaping a daughter's decisions about whether to engage in specific risky behaviors. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), psychological presence is an expression of the internal working model (IWM) of the parent that is retained and can later be accessed for guidance and orientation. Rostad et al. (2014) attributed daughters' decision making concerning risky behaviors to the quality and substance of the IWM that was formed out of the relationship to their father.

Paternal involvement can have long-term effects on daughters' mental and emotional health. Flouri and Buchanan (2003) used data from the National Child Development Study (8441 cohort members) to explore the influence of father involvement on children's later mental health. Cohort members were assessed for father involvement at age 7, for emotional and behavioral problems at age 16, and subsequently for psychological distress at age 33. Higher levels of father involvement at age 7 were associated with better psychological adjustment in adolescence. Father involvement at age 16 served as a protective factor for women's later ratings of psychological distress. Flouri and Buchanan found that each of these relationships existed independently of ratings for mother involvement. Among the range of personal and



environmental factors that might impact a woman's mental health, Flouri and Buchanan found paternal involvement accounted for 19% at age 16 and 11% at age 33. While these percentages are not overwhelming, they are considerable given the multitude of other factors that can contribute to mental health during early-middle adulthood.

A final area of importance in this domain is the association between paternal involvement and depressive symptoms among girls and women. A review of the literature on depression in women found that it is correlated more closely with the quality of a daughter's relationship to her father than to her mother (Videon, 2005), with the highest rates for clinical depression and eating disorders being seen in women during their late adolescent and early adult years (Maine, 2004). Vivona (2000) found that college-aged women whose attachment to their fathers was rated as insecure showed the highest rates for clinical depression. Vivona stated that in a sample of 183 daughters between the ages of 17 and 29, daughters showed higher rates of clinical depression when they perceived their fathers as rejecting them.

Focusing specifically on adolescent girls and depression, a meta-analysis of 24 studies found that girls whose fathers had not been actively involved in their lives were at greater risk for depression and other emotional problems (Sarkadi, Kirstiansson, Oberklai, & Bremberg, 2008). This finding held even when controlling for variables related to family income. Jenkins et al. (2002) studied the connection between adolescents' relationship qualities, self-efficacy, and depressive symptoms with 12-year-old boys ( $N = 114$ ) and girls ( $N = 109$ ) and found that low paternal support was a significant predictor of girls' depression. Jenkins et al. found that depressive symptoms in girls were associated with lower levels of parental intimate support (accounting for 20% of variance) and greater levels of conflict with parents (19% of variance), and conflict with fathers was more strongly associated with depressive symptoms in girls than in

boys. In considering the implications of their findings, the authors suggested the need to strengthen dimensions of support and conflict management between parents and children as an important step in managing early symptoms of adolescent depression.

A daughter's perception of her father seems to play an important part in her emotional health. A qualitative study by Demidenko et al. (2015) used semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the father-daughter relationship for girls who were diagnosed with clinical depression ( $n = 51$ ) and their nondepressed peers ( $n = 65$ ). The analysis of narratives for these daughters and their fathers was informative. Demidenko et al. found that girls diagnosed with depression felt that their fathers were less warm and less emotionally available to them. They also reported more problems with communication and a greater sense of paternal rejection. Accounts from fathers of these clinically depressed daughters showed agreement with the contention that communication was poor, with fathers reporting frustration and a sense of helplessness about this. Because it is frequently noted as an area of conflict and frustration, Demidenko et al. noted communication as a further focus for practitioners who seek to intervene in the relationship between fathers and daughters at this stage.

**Well-being.** Closely related to the areas surveyed above is the overall adjustment and psychological well-being of girls and women—a further area that has been associated with the quality of the father-daughter relationship. While the construct of well-being includes aspects of mental, emotional, and behavioral health, it holds an expanded focus that also takes into account the overall functioning and adjustment of an individual. The quality of the father-daughter relationship has been found to play a role in the lifelong stress-response of daughters. Byrd-Craven et al. (2012) examined the father-daughter relationship in order to see what role cortisol levels might play in regulating girls' stress responses. The authors hypothesized that father-

daughter relationship quality may influence the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) reactivity of daughters. Because the HPA glands play a role in regulating cortisol levels, they are important to the management of stressful situations.

In support of this hypothesis, Byrd-Craven et al. (2012) found that daughters who characterized their relationship with their father as warm, autonomous, supportive, and structured showed lower cortisol levels prior to engagement with a stressful situation. They also showed reduced cortisol levels when introduced to a stressful situation when compared with peers who described their relationship to their fathers as being characterized by rejection, chaos, and coercion. This finding has profound implications, as higher cortisol levels and greater HPA reactivity have been associated with a number of behavioral and physical health problems, including sleep problems, high blood pressure, asthma, alcoholism, smoking, chronic pain disorders, somatic symptoms, fibromyalgia, and autoimmune diseases (Luecken, Kraft, & Hagen, 2009).

**Academic and occupational achievement.** Daughters' academic and occupational attainments also closely link to father involvement. While both parents play an important role in preparing their children for success in school, early interaction with fathers is especially important in the development of children's language skills. In contrast with mothers, fathers tend to communicate with toddlers by using more questions (Rowe, Cocker, & Pan, 2004). This may encourage children to assume more responsibility in communication by prompting them to use a wider vocabulary and longer utterances in responding to their fathers. This pattern of paternal importance holds for children's earliest experiences in school. Children of fathers who are actively involved have better quantitative and verbal skills, better grades and achievement test scores, read better, and perform better in school overall (Gadsen & Ray, 2003; Howard,

Lefever, Borkowski, & Witman, 2006; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005; Nord & West, 2001).

Lamb (2010) reports that daughters' academic achievement may be more closely associated with the quality of the girl's relationship to her father than the quality of relationship to her mother. Studying the impact of paternal support on daughters' overall style of life, Perkins (2001) noted that adolescent girls who experienced a strong father-daughter bond were more academically successful than were girls who described their fathers as distant or disengaged. Children with involved fathers are also more likely to enjoy school, participate in extracurricular activities, and eventually graduate from high school (Flouri, 2005).

Extracurricular activities, particularly athletics, can make a big difference for girls. Girls who are involved in athletics report that it has helped them to be more self-disciplined, ambitious, and successful (Lobo, 2010). The endurance and transferability of these traits means that they are likely to benefit daughters in academic and occupational settings throughout the lifespan. Kay (2010) conducted extensive study of women involved in college and professional athletics and found that these women consistently credited their fathers with directing and supporting their competitive drive. At the same time, it was also noted that high levels of paternal involvement with athletics can lead to conflict and strain in the father-daughter relationship.

Daughters' occupational choices may be strongly influenced by the quality of the paternal relationship. Daughters who reported more open communication with their fathers were more likely to be receptive to their advice about entering into careers in fields that have traditionally been dominated by males (Morrill & Hellerstein, 2009). This includes jobs in STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) that are associated with greater competition

and higher pay. Overall, daughters are increasingly following the career paths of their fathers. Women's labor participation rates have been tracked longitudinally and compared with the chosen career fields of their fathers (Hellerstein & Morrell, 2011). Looking at more than 70 years of labor data, Hellerstein and Morrell (2011) found that the daughters were 13 to 20% more likely to enter into the career field their father was in than into any other profession.

In summary, daughters who have involved fathers are likely to have higher academic achievement, are more inclined to benefit from involvement with extracurricular activities, and are more prone to choose careers in competitive fields that have traditionally been dominated by males. It is important to note, however, that it is the quality rather than the mere existence of a father-daughter relationship that is significant in mediating the extent of paternal influence on daughters' academic and career choices.

**Romantic and/or opposite sex relationships.** This section builds upon the earlier review of fathers' responses to their daughters' pubertal changes by looking at how these interactions may impact the sexual socialization of their daughters. These interactions play a key role in priming daughters for subsequent relationships with males. Researchers have found that fathers play a prominent role in preparing their daughters for healthy relationships with men and boys. This pattern holds for all relationships with the opposite sex, but it is particularly relevant in the area of romantic relationships. When compared with mothers, fathers have a greater impact on daughters' ability to trust, enjoy, and relate well to the males in her life (Flouri, 2005; Kast, 1997; Leonard, 1998). Similarly, the quality of the father-daughter bond, more so than the bond between daughters and their mothers, has been found to be predictive of daughters' satisfaction in romantic relationships (Dalton, Frick-Hornbury, & Kitzmann, 2006; Scharf & Mayseless, 2008).

A study of retrospective reports by young adults ( $N = 75$ ) found that daughters who remembered positive parenting experiences scored higher on multiple dimensions associated with healthy relationships (Dalton et al., 2006). Specifically, daughters in this group tended to view others as responsive and accessible, viewed relationships as meaningful and important, and saw themselves as capable of forming healthy relationships. While these factors were assessed in terms of daughters' relationships with members of both sexes, Dalton et al. (2006) identified the quality of daughters' relationships to their fathers as the most salient factor in daughters' reports on the quality of their current romantic relationships.

Black and Schutte (2006) found that daughters who were securely attached to their fathers were better able to establish and maintain emotionally close and satisfying relationships with men. This study, conducted with 205 undergraduates (89 males, 116 females, median age of 19.4), found that daughters who rated their relationships with their fathers as positive and loving were more prone to seek comfort from their partners and showed a greater comfort with turning to their partners for support. Overall, Black and Schutte found that secure father-daughter attachment was positively associated with measures of family cohesion, organization, and expressiveness, and it negatively correlated with family conflict and control (p. 1467).

Scharf and Mayseless (2008) looked specifically at the impact of maternal and paternal relationships on 17-year-old daughters' ( $N = 127$ ) romantic relationships. While both parents exerted an influence on daughters' relationship quality, mothers were found to have a greater role in promoting delays in sexual engagement by daughters, whereas fathers exerted a greater influence on the quality of the romantic relationship. This finding for mothers contrasts with other studies on father involvement and daughters' sexual behavior where paternal factors were more closely linked with the timing of girls' first sexual involvement. Ali Husin (2013) found

that daughters raised in father-absent homes were likely to show earlier sexual debut, whereas girls who reported higher levels of sexual communication with their fathers were found to delay sexual involvement (Hutchinson, 2002; Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011).

As has been discussed, fathers may feel uncomfortable communicating with their daughters on topics related to sexual and romantic involvement (Wright, 2009). Despite this reticence on the part of fathers, communication of this kind can be a protective factor for girls. Daughters who have experienced more open communication around topics of sexuality show greater confidence and assertiveness in resisting emotional domination and unwanted sexual advances by their boyfriends (Katz & van der Kloet, 2010). These discussions between fathers and daughters do not need to focus narrowly on the topic of sex. Daughters who enjoy open communication with their fathers may benefit in other ways that have an implicit impact on their later romantic relationships. Katz and van der Kloet (2010) found that daughters who reported a positive and open relationship with their fathers were more comfortable with their appearance and body weight, and these factors enabled them to be more comfortable and confident in their relationship with their romantic partner.

To summarize, the cross-gendered nature of the father-daughter relationship seems to take on special importance in preparing girls for later relationships with males. Girls who experience close and supportive paternal involvement are better able to relate to the males in their lives—showing higher levels of confidence, better overall relational self-efficacy, and an ability to make more deliberate decisions about sexual involvement. The quality of the father-daughter relationship is a powerful influence on a woman's ability to establish and maintain a satisfying romantic relationship with a male during her life.

**Generativity: Fathering Behavior and Men's Development**

Having reviewed the importance of fathering for daughters, it is worthwhile to recognize that men also benefit from sustained involvement in the fathering role. This finding offers direct support to the generative fathering framework—a conceptual ethic based on the assumption that men continue to develop in meaningful ways throughout the lifespan and reap particular benefit from their involvement in the generative work of caring for and nurturing the next generation (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1998). After briefly considering relevant aspects of the generative fathering framework, this section will review empirical literature that speaks to the advantages men may receive from father involvement in the areas of psychological health, physical health, and social connectedness.

**Generative fathering as a father-affirming approach.** Hawkins and Dollahite (1998) put forward the conceptual ethic of generative fathering as a counter to the existing role inadequacy paradigm (RIP) that has tended to dominate recent cultural perspectives of fatherhood. The RIP has been criticized for employing a deficit perspective of fatherhood that concentrates more on the failures and shortcomings of fathers than on the many ways that they meaningfully contribute to the lives of their children. Furthermore, the RIP is seen as a static model that fails to recognize fathering as a developmental process that is largely characterized by men's ongoing growth and improvement. Hawkins and Dollahite contend that the RIP misconstrues men's motives toward fathering by assuming that they are “uncaring, uninterested, uncommitted, and unwilling” (p. 11) to fulfill their role and therefore must be coerced or otherwise compelled to uphold their paternal duty by society and society's laws.

In contrast with the RIP, proponents of a generative fathering framework uphold the high calling of fatherhood and believe that it is something that men are capable of, called to do, and



ultimately benefit from (Brotherson et al., 2005). Rather than being defined by shifting cultural norms, generative fathering is driven by enduring consideration of children's developmental needs and corresponding paternal responsibilities. Fathering draws from and expresses an essential part of men's identity by providing them an opportunity to steward their energy and their time toward the betterment of their offspring in ways that promote children's development, facilitate personal generativity, and strengthen intergenerational bonds. Unsurprisingly, the investment in work as meaningful as this—while wrought with sacrifice and occasional struggle—contributes to the overall health and development of men who are fathers. This is most true for men who are deliberate and intentional in assuming the responsibilities inherent in bringing a child into the world. An impressive body of literature has emerged in support of the contention that involved fathering can be beneficial for men, particularly when men most fully embrace and fulfill the distinctive calling of fatherhood. The ensuing pages will provide a survey of this literature.

**Fathering and psychological health.** The psychological health of fathers seems to depend a great deal on the extent and the intensity of their involvement with their children. The tone of such involvement may be established in the initial moments of waiting for and encountering a first child. A qualitative study of 40 first-time fathers stated that men reported feelings of elation such as joy, excitement, and anticipation along with more negative feelings of uncertainty, stress, depression, and anxiety (Palkovitz, 2002). Though they reported a range of complex emotions surrounding the occurrence of this momentous and life-changing event, on the whole, the fathers in this study described the transition to fatherhood as a positive experience (Palkovitz, 2002).

For first-time fathers, marital status and other important life factors can be an important influence on psychological adjustment. Waldvogel and Ehlert (2016) succinctly but effectively sum up the research on fatherhood and psychological well-being with this statement: “The emotional consequences of fatherhood are markedly conditional on the context in which fatherhood is lived out” (p. 181). The circumstances within which men encounter fatherhood can make a big difference in their later investment in and satisfaction with the parenting role. Unmarried fathers show greater levels of depression, lower levels of self-efficacy, and lower rates of self-esteem than their married peers (Nomaguchi & Milke, 2003). A study by Hofferth and Goldscheider (2010) found that unmarried younger fathers tend to be less secure in their employment, are more likely to have multipartner fertility, and are less likely to be living with their children. These findings point to the importance of men’s preparedness for fatherhood—a factor that may be determined by the extent to which they have intentionally and thoughtfully decided to bring a child into the world.

Men who are more deliberate about the decision to have children and are more secure in terms of finances and relations with the child’s mother are likely to make a more positive adjustment to fatherhood (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Townsend, 2002; Wilcox, 2002). Involved fathers report higher levels of satisfaction with the parenting role (Lamb, 2010), more intrinsic motivation toward interaction with their children (De Luccie, 1996), and higher rates of supportive interactions with children (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001).

Unsurprisingly, fathering impacts men’s psychological health. Fathers who are actively involved in their children’s lives tend to be more psychosocially mature (Pleck, 2007; Snarey, 1993), more satisfied with their lives overall (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001), and less affected by psychological distress (Ozer, Barnett, Brennan, & Sperling, 1998). Involved fathering has even

been associated with greater levels of self-understanding, higher levels of empathy, and increased acceptance and integration of feelings (Heath, 1994).

The total psychological impact of fathering can be difficult to calculate. As the studies cited above indicate, men can benefit in numerous ways from meaningful involvement with their children. At the same time, the stresses associated with paternal responsibilities and the investment of emotional capital in the lives of offspring can carry a cost. Fathers may be particularly prone to psychological distress in middle age when relations with one or more of their children are strained (Milke, Bierman, & Schieman, 2008). Similarly, fathers are likely to experience an increase in depressive symptoms when one of their children experiences a negative life event, such as illness, personal problems, or divorce (Pudravska, 2009).

**Fathering and physical health.** Becoming a father can also affect a man's physical health, impacting his biology, behavior, and even his longevity. A number of specific biological changes associated with fathering have been identified. One interesting stream of research has looked at the ways that long-term pairing (the sort that characterizes a two-parent home where the father is living with his female partner and their children) impacts the hormonal levels of men and thereby serves to prime them for fathering. Men's testosterone (T) levels tend to increase prior to mating but then level off and decrease once a baby is born (Story, Walsh, Quinton, & Wynne-Edwards, 2000). Along with this decrease in T, increases in fathers' oxytocin and prolactin levels may prepare them to settle down in a committed relationship, to bond with their children, and to interact with their children in a sustained caregiving capacity (Gordon, Zagoory-Sharon, Leckman, & Feldman, 2010).

A cross-sectional study by Gray, Yang, and Pope (2006) of 126 men found that co-habiting married fathers had lower T levels when compared with married men who were not

fathers and unmarried men who were not fathers. Using a longitudinal design, Gettler, McDade, Feranil, and Kuzawa (2011), examined the differences between partnered fathers and nonfathers for measures of morning and evening T levels. Gettler et al. found that partnered fathers showed large declines in morning (-26%) and evening (-36%) T levels when compared with single nonfathers. Most relevant to the present focus of this review, fathers who engaged in higher levels of involved care with their children (3 hours or more per day) had lower T levels than did fathers who were not involved in daily care (Gettler et al., 2011). These studies on testosterone may have broader implications for men's health: T levels have been found to play an antagonistic role in immune functioning and may be associated with decreased lifespan in males (Roberts, Buchanan, & Evan, 2004). An innovative and unusual study by Min, Lee, and Park (2012) examined Korean eunuchs from the past two centuries and found that they lived an average of 17 years longer than noncastrated males. The authors contended that the difference in T levels was a primary factor in this dramatic difference in lifespan.

On the whole, research on the longevity of parents versus nonparents has been somewhat convoluted, though the picture for men is more positive than it is for women. Largely due to the biological cost associated with bearing and giving birth to children, parenting may carry a higher cost for mothers than fathers. Demonstrating this disparity, Jasionka, Nenko, and Jasienski (2006) conducted an investigation of the impact of reproduction and parenting on the longevity of parents in rural Poland. In their sample of 4,310 people (2,147 women and 2,163 men) the authors found that mothers' lifespans decreased by an average of 95 weeks per son or daughter. While sons had no significant impact on paternal longevity, fathers were found to gain an additional 74 weeks of life for each daughter who was born. Jasionka et al. readily

acknowledged the distinctiveness of the research population but called for a greater investigation of the differential impact of reproduction on the longevity of men and women.

Married fathers tend to show better health outcomes than married nonfathers (Umberson, 2010). Lawlor et al. (2002) found that married men who have children have a reduced risk of heart disease. Beyond any contribution related to T levels or other biological changes associated with fatherhood, the improved health outcomes that married fathers enjoy have been attributed to the better lifestyle choices that they make (Settersten & Cangel-Tirando, 2010). Settersten and Cangel-Tirando (2010) theorized that men who are fathers are less likely to engage in risky behaviors out of consideration for the welfare of their children. A further motivation may come from these men's desire to set a good example for their children by modeling healthy lifestyle choices. Perhaps reflecting this, married fathers are less likely to smoke or drink alcohol excessively and are more likely to engage in exercise in old age than childless men (Kendig, Dykstra, van Gallen, & Melkas, 2007). An earlier review by Pleck (1997) seems to confirm this finding. Pleck found that fathers who are involved with their children reported less legal involvement, lower levels of substance abuse, fewer hospital admissions, and fewer accidental or premature deaths.

**Fathering and social connectedness.** The ways that men spend their time and the ways in which they relate to those around them tend to change once they become fathers. This is particularly true for men who are living in the home with their children and are regularly involved in their care. Resident fathers who are actively engaged with their children are more likely to be involved in community or civic organizations (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001), have higher levels of engagement in kin relationships (Eggebeen, Dew, & Knoester, 2010), and are

more involved with religious communities (Edgell, 2006; Ploch & Hastings, 1998). In the paragraphs that follow, each of these areas will be considered in greater detail.

Fatherhood is associated with greater involvement in groups and organizations that directly cater to children and families, although the level of involvement tends to vary by type of fathering, with residential biological fathers showing the highest rates of involvement (Wilson, 2000). These groups include service organizations, community organizations, and organizations catering to youth recreation (such as sports teams and scouting groups). When compared with nonresident fathers and childless men, resident fathers are significantly more likely to be involved with service-oriented and community-focused organizations (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). This is true even for organizations that do not directly cater to the family, such as labor unions, political organizations, national organizations, and professional societies (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). In addressing this discrepancy between fathers and nonfathers, Eggebeen, Knoester, and McDaniel (2013) explain that fathers are not simply more civic minded. Rather, men who become fathers tend to spend their time in activities that are less focused on personal leisure (such as golf, recreational hobbies, or going out to bars) and are more centered on family and community betterment (Eggebeen et al., 2013). While the authors do not explicitly describe this involvement as generative work, it clearly fits within an Eriksonian framework for middle adulthood development (Erikson, 1968).

Beyond the increase in civic and community engagement, involved fathers have been found to take steps toward the strengthening of intergenerational kinship ties (Eggebeen et al., 2010). Reports from fathers indicate that they are more involved with visiting and corresponding with family (letter writing and phone calls) than are nonfathers. Grandparents are the primary objects of this increased involvement (Eggebeen et al., 2010). Multigenerational ties can be a

particular source of strength for children and are a prominent focus in the generative fathering framework (Eggebeen et al., 2010).

A qualitative study of male kin relationships by Bates and Goodsell (2013) examined the narratives of grandsons as they reflected on their relationship to their grandfathers. This study employed a generative grandfathering framework (an extension of generative fathering) in its conceptual framework and considered variations on the fatherwork domains of generative fathering as they applied to the grandfather-grandson relationship. While the narratives of grandsons varied greatly, on the whole the participants attributed the following benefits to their relationships with their grandfathers: an enriched sense of identity, sense of family heritage, and increased opportunities for character modeling (Bates & Goodsell, 2013). Recognizing the degree to which connections between extended generations depend upon the active facilitation of the parents who connect them, the authors pointed to the central importance of fathers in promoting the bond between grandsons and grandfathers.

Finally, fathers, more so than nonfathers, tend to be more involved in religious organizations and show higher rates of attendance at religious services (King, 2003). The reasons for this are likely varied, but King (2003) found that parenthood may prompt men to become more religiously involved as they face the challenge of providing their children with both meaning and values. Offering an additional explanation for the increase in church attendance among married fathers, Edgell (2006) found that men tend to see the church as a prime setting for social support and affiliation with other families who share their values.

Following the earlier review of benefits that can accrue to daughters from having an involved father, this section looked at the distinct benefits that men may derive from fatherhood. Notably, this review has demonstrated that it is father involvement, rather than merely the fact of

fatherhood, that is most closely linked with benefits in the areas of psychological health, physical health, and increases in social connectedness. The next section will explore the ways that father/adolescent-daughter bonds can be strengthened through participation in direct therapeutic intervention.

### **Interventions Designed to Promote Fathering of Adolescent Daughters**

In keeping with the present study's focus on understanding ways that fathers can be more effectively equipped to support their adolescent daughters, this section will survey empirical studies that speak to both the limitations and potential benefits of interventions that are designed for this purpose. The lack of robust literature about treatments for the father/adolescent-daughter relationship will require that a broader array of studies on family interventions and treatment with men be reviewed. Because it is a common theme in research on therapy with fathers, the challenge of recruiting and retaining men in therapy will be considered specifically. This section will conclude with a consideration of empirically supported practices that have been found to promote men's involvement in family-oriented services.

### **Men's Involvement in Therapeutic Services**

On the whole, research has shown that men are not as receptive as women are regarding participation in therapy. This trend holds for men's involvement with both individual services and family-focused interventions. Although the causes of this reluctance are complex, they have received a good deal of research attention. Researchers have also been interested in understanding the ways that men and their families can benefit from participation in supportive services. This section will survey research that touches on both of these areas by exploring factors that contribute to men's low rates of participation in therapy and the distinct benefits associated with such participation when it can be successfully promoted.



**Factors contributing to men's low participation in family services.** Men, overall, are less likely than women to participate in therapeutic services (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Cusak, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2004). Seeking to understand the reasons behind this, researchers have identified a number of specific barriers that may inhibit men's greater participation in mental health services. Identified barriers include a decreased likelihood of identifying feelings related to personal distress, masculine attitudes relating to self-reliance, a tendency to minimize problems, the use of problem-based (rather than emotion-based) coping strategies, concerns about privacy, and a desire to maintain emotional control (Cauce et al., 2002; Levant, Wimer, Williams, Bryant Smalley, & Noronha, 2009; Mansfield, Addis, & Courtenay, 2005; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001).

Levant et al. (2009) examined the extent to which college attending men's ( $N = 137$ ) attitudes toward psychological help seeking related to their scores in the following three measures of masculine identity: traditional masculine ideology, conformity to masculine norms, and gender role conflict. Traditional masculine ideology serves to define the norms or expectations of how men "should" behave. Conformity to masculine norms is a measure of the extent to which men actually do measure up to these norms. Gender role conflict occurs when the pressure to conform to societal gender norms results in restrictions on the expression of nonconforming emotions or behaviors. Participants who had higher ratings in each of the three measures of masculine identity were associated with more negative attitudes toward psychological health-seeking (Levant et al., 2009). Taken together, these three variables accounted for 28.6% of the variance seen in ratings for psychological help seeking (Levant et al., 2009).

For a variety of reasons, men's participation in family-oriented services can be especially difficult to promote (Fabiano, 2007; Rojas, Fields, Binitie, Curley, & Phares, 2006; Tiano & McNeal, 2005). Services geared toward the family have been criticized for their lack of appeal to men on many levels but most notably because of problems with the ways that these services are marketed (Metzler, Sanders, Rusby, & Crowley, 2012), the way that they are structured (Fletcher & Visser, 2008), the settings in which they take place (Bayley et al., 2009), and their failure to prioritize men adequately in the ways that these services are developed and implemented (Frank, Keown, Dittman, & Sanders, 2014; Sanders, Dittman, Keown, Farrugia, & Rose, 2010).

Seeking to understand the perspectives of men who participated in residential parenting programs in Australia, Cosson and Graham (2012) conducted five focus groups with 27 fathers who reported negative service experiences. The men in these studies described a wide range of service-related experiences that led them to feel marginalized as parents. Some of the fathers felt that service workers saw them as "secondary parents" who were "at best helpers, and at worst incompetent" (p. 127). Cosson and Graham noted the lack of specific attention to fathering (rather than mothering) experiences and the absence of male service workers as further barriers. Despite these challenges, the men in the study made frequent reference to their love for their children as a compelling force in driving them to improve. Numerous fathers indicated that negative experiences with their own fathers were something that they wanted to rise above, though they frequently struggled to understand what it meant to "be a good father" (Cosson & Graham, 2012, p. 125).

Family services are most often initiated in response to problems on the part of children, and Rojas et al. (2006) found that most referral calls to service providers are made by mothers.

Whether problems are related to internalizing or externalizing behaviors, the majority of evidence-based treatment protocols call for some involvement on the part of parents (Brown et al., 2008). Systematic reviews of family therapy have found that fathers are much less likely than mothers to be involved in children's treatment. The ratio of maternal and paternal involvement ranges from 2:1 (Duhig, Phares, & Birkeland, 2002) to 3:1 (Lazar, Sagi, & Fraser, 1991). Some of this discrepancy may be due to clinicians' failure to solicit paternal involvement (Duhig et al., 2002), although it is also possible that fathers are less likely to participate in services even when invited. A survey of therapists by Rojas et al. (2006) found that only 56% of fathers, compared with 85% of mothers, were responsive to a direct invitation to be a part of their child's therapy.

**Benefits associated with fathers' participation in family services.** Research on children's therapy outcomes has frequently failed to assess along dimensions of parental participation. This tendency has made it difficult to determine the extent to which such participation plays a part in therapeutic gains that children achieve. To the extent that parental participation has been assessed, it has often failed to distinguish between mothers and fathers, or it has concentrated on mothers exclusively (Bögels & Phares, 2008; Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008). Despite these deficiencies, meta-analyses of paternal involvement in children's therapy have consistently found that it makes a positive difference (Holmes et al., 2010; Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Participation by fathers has been associated with better outcomes and more enduring treatment gains for children (Bagner & Eyberg, 2003; Webster-Stratton, 1985).

A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of 16 resident fathering education programs found an aggregated effect size of  $d = .26$  (Holmes et al., 2010). Not all of the studies that were a part

of the meta-analysis provided ratings for each measure. The number of studies included for analysis of each effect and the associated effect size are as follows: father involvement ( $k = 10$ ,  $d = .282$ ,  $p < .001$ ), fathering attitudes ( $k = 10$ ,  $d = .279$ ,  $p < .05$ ), father-child relationship outcomes ( $k = 3$ ,  $d = .613$ ,  $k < .001$ ), co-parenting outcomes ( $k = 4$ ,  $d = .135$ ,  $k < .05$ ), father well-being ( $k = 7$ ,  $d = .001$ ), and child behavior ( $k = 6$ ,  $d = .174$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Holmes et al., 2010). While some of these effect sizes are impressive, Holmes et al. (2010) identified a number of methodological issues with the studies that were reviewed. Most notably, Holmes et al. pointed out that the dearth of studies that have looked specifically at fathers' participation and outcomes resulted in a less than optimal sample for analysis. Beyond this, Holmes et al. offered the following recommendations for future fathering education program research: more long-term follow-up to determine the duration of effects, a focus on fathers of teens and not only fathers of children, the need for multiple reporters to offset the impact of self-report bias, and focusing on father-child relationship outcomes in addition to assessing factors related to paternal attitude and involvement (p. 249).

It may be that children benefit indirectly from having parents involved in their therapy. The skills and insights that parents carry away from their participation in child-focused services are likely to be of personal benefit—an outcome that is anticipated to improve the environment and the relationships that are most important to children's flourishing. A study by Feinberg and Kan (2008) found that family interventions focused on communication, problem solving, emotional self-management, and conflict management resulted in greater marital satisfaction, lower levels of distress in the home, more supportive behaviors by parents, and better emotional regulation in children.

Perhaps because children's externalizing behaviors are most consistently identified as problems that require parental therapeutic involvement, programs that address such behaviors have received the bulk of research attention. Multisystemic therapy (MST)—a treatment approach that was developed to promote the behavioral health of antisocial adolescents—is an example of this. Gervan, Granic, Solomon, Blokland, and Ferguson (2012) investigated the impact of paternal involvement in MST treatment across outcome measures of adolescents' externalizing and internalizing behaviors and maternal depression. Ninety-nine families from five different mental health agencies participated in the study, with participants being broken down into two comparison groups. Gervan et al. compared pre- and post-test scores from adolescents in a paternal-involvement-in-treatment (PIT) group with those in a no-paternal-involvement-in-treatment group (NPIT). The authors found that maternal depression showed significant declines from pre-treatment levels, but it was not significantly different for the PIT and NPIT groups. On measures of adolescents internalizing and externalizing behaviors, Gervan et al. found that both groups experienced clinically significant improvements, although the magnitude of change for the PIT group dramatically exceeded that of the NPIT group. These differences remained even when the researchers statistically controlled for variables related to the father's presence in the home (Gervan et al., 2012).

Behavioral parent training is another treatment approach that addresses behavioral problems in children. A substantial amount of research on the benefits of fathers' participation in family services has come from investigation of outcomes with behavioral parent training. Helfenbaum-Kun and Ortiz (2007) found that paternal participation can improve children's outcomes by helping to ensure that both parents implement treatment recommendations in a consistent and coordinated manner. A systematic review of 26 studies on parenting programs by

Lundahl et al. (2008) demonstrated mixed results. Although fathers were found to play an important part in shaping children's outcomes, they showed less improvement in parenting skills than the mothers who were involved. In their discussion of the study, the authors noted a need for specific investigation of the comparative effectiveness of father-only parenting groups. Identifying another problem, the method section of Lundahl et al.'s study illustrated the extent to which fathers are frequently left out of both services and research on family interventions. In discussing the method of their meta-analysis, Lundahl et al. found 562 potential studies on behavioral parent training, and only the 26 that were reviewed met the qualification of specifically looking at and assessing paternal participation.

This gap was also evident when reviewing research on paternal participation in services for girls. No studies that looked specifically at the relationship between paternal involvement and daughters' outcomes could be identified. The lack of research in this area is likely a result of two meaningful deficits in the field: First, it affirms the failure to attend specifically to the importance of paternal participation in children's therapy; and second, it reflects the general lack of services designed to cater directly to this family pairing. The proposed study will help to address both of these deficits by exploring the experiences of men who have participated in just such a targeted intervention.

### **Increasing Father Involvement in Family Services**

Because there are both barriers and benefits associated with men's involvement in family-oriented services, understanding the ways that such involvement can be promoted is of the utmost importance. The call for more inclusive and "father friendly" services is widespread and has spurred the development of a prescriptive literature that is focused on identifying best practices and general recommendations for clinicians and programs that seek to be more

receptive to paternal involvement. This section will review this burgeoning literature by examining studies that identify specific factors associated with increased father involvement in treatment along with empirically derived best practice recommendations.

**Factors associated with increased father involvement in treatment.** Efforts toward increasing fathers' involvement in family-oriented services should begin with recognition of barriers that may be present in current service delivery. That topic was addressed in the previous section and will be built upon here. Fathering services should also be intentional about attending to the expressed needs and preferences of fathers themselves. This section will survey research on ways that barriers to men's participation in family services can be overcome along with studies on men's preferences and experiences in services.

Numerous studies have found that men are not aware of the range of services that are available to support their parenting (Bayley et al., 2009; Berlyn, et al., 2008; Frank et al., 2014; Metzler et al., 2012). Raising awareness of these services and improving the ways that they are marketed will be an important first step toward increasing men's involvement. Berlyn et al. (2008) offer a number of specific recommendations on how fathering programs can be more effectively marketed to men, including awareness campaigns that directly target the settings where fathers are located: their places of employment, schools, daycares, community groups, and religious communities. With regard to the ways that services are presented, Berlyn et al. suggest using active words that are more in keeping with masculine identities, such as *coaching*, *tools*, *building*, and *strategy*, and avoiding more passive terms such as *support*. Acknowledging men's appreciation for outcome-driven interventions, marketing to fathers might also place a greater emphasis on the specific benefits that services may provide rather than focusing on the therapy process itself.

Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) offer further insight into the ways that boys and men can be most effectively engaged in therapy with their examination of the ways that those in the helping community have discounted masculine identities. The authors assert that many traditional approaches to treatment of males have tended to pathologize masculine attitudes and behaviors. Whether it is explicitly expressed or implicitly conveyed through attitudes and practices, this tendency can serve to reinforce males' resistance to engagement in services (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). The authors put forward a model of positive psychology/positive masculinity (PPPM) that brings intentional emphasis to the unique value found in masculine ways of relating, caring, and fathering. In addition to a number of specific recommendations for clinicians, Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) urge the adoption of an overriding ethic that is affirming of masculine strengths and responsive to the distinctive ways that males engage with the challenges in their lives. The authors conclude their recommendation by advocating for a reorientation of counselor education programs so that aspiring clinicians can be trained to develop a greater appreciation of the PPPM paradigm. Echoing this sentiment, Fletcher and Visser (2008) have called for the "development of a comprehensive framework for professional competencies in father engagement" (p. 62).

The recommendations put forward by Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) find general support in the earlier cited study conducted by Berlyn et al. (2008). Because of its particular relevance to the topic at hand, this study will be presented at greater length. The nation of Australia has been at the forefront of research on fathers' participation in family services, largely through examination of men's engagement with nationally established but locally run Family Relationship Centers (FRCs). The widespread availability of these centers with their explicit aim of promoting fathering and overall family success makes them a prime subject of investigation.



Recognition of the under-participation by fathers at FRCs led to a research initiative called the National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. As part of this initiative, Berlyn et al. conducted a qualitative study of fathers and family-service workers with the goal of understanding the factors that contribute to men's decreased rates of participation at FRCs. The results of this study are illuminative.

Thirty-two fathers participated in seven focus groups and individual follow-up interviews in Berlyn et al.'s study (2008). Along with this, 17 professional family service workers participated in in-depth interviews. Accounts from fathers and professionals showed both convergence and divergence in a number of areas. Berlyn et al. found that the two groups agreed that conceptions of fatherhood have become more egalitarian in recent decades, with fathers being expected to play a greater part in daily caregiving than in previous generations. Both groups also showed agreement about the general benefit of fathering for children's development. Berlyn et al. reported that fathers consistently noted a reluctance toward involvement at FRCs, with many men expressing a sense that such "help seeking" was a sign of weakness. Fathers also indicated that they felt such services were primarily designed and intended for mothers. Other fathers expressed an interest in services that might improve their parenting but were unclear on how to access such services. In the in-depth interview portion of the study conducted by Berlyn et al., professionals acknowledged that the structure and setting of services were not "father friendly"—particularly noting that the setting included pictures of mothers and children but rarely showed fathers. Magazines in the lobbies of FRCs were geared exclusively toward topics more traditionally associated with women's interests. Finally, professionals mentioned the traditional "expert" approach as a potential barrier to men. Fathers seemed to echo this concern with statements that indicated a fear of being talked down to or diminished. In addition to

identifying potential barriers to greater involvement, Berlyn et al.'s study provided numerous recommendations for how services could be improved, a topic which will be taken up in the next section.

**Best practice recommendations for working with fathers.** This section will summarize research on fathers' involvement in family services with a view toward identifying best practices for treatment. Particular attention will be given to factors related to the content, design, and implementation of fathering services. While new research findings will be included, this section will also draw upon relevant themes that were presented earlier in this literature review.

The preceding section made reference to a number of best practices for the marketing and presentation of fathering services (Berlyn et al., 2008). Services that are directly marketed to fathers may differ in content from those that are geared more generically to "parents" or exclusively to mothers. Identification of these specific differences is important. Presenting services in a way that is compelling and father-affirming could increase men's awareness and interest in services. Once contact has been made, it is important for clinicians and service workers to establish an expectation of paternal involvement in treatment right from the outset (Fabiano, 2007). Because mothers are often the initial point of contact for family workers, Rojas et al. (2006) recommended that clinicians specifically reach out to fathers in order to solicit their participation. Bagner and Eyberg (2003) found that when clinicians directly invite fathers to participate in services and adjust meeting times to accommodate their schedules, a full 78% of them agreed to attend.

The importance of father involvement for adolescent daughters has been emphasized throughout this chapter. The earlier review of female adolescent development and the

identification of specific areas of paternal importance for girls provide a rich source of information from which therapeutic content may be drawn. In keeping with a father-affirming ethic, clinicians might begin therapy by briefing men on the overwhelming body of research that demonstrates their importance to their children. The information that is presented could be tailored to the specific issues and relational dynamics that are involved in a specific case. Men will likely benefit from this opportunity to develop an enriched understanding of their value. Clinicians involved with father-daughter work are advised to focus specifically on research in this area—a topic that is explored at some length in this chapter.

Maintaining a focus on clinical work with fathers and adolescent daughters, the content of sessions should be focused on specific areas of recognized relational strain. This chapter has provided a literature-based review of the numerous specific challenges that confront the father/adolescent-daughter relationship. Men can be encouraged to explore their practices in areas that are associated with improved relations and better adjustment by daughters. Pulling from the highlights of the earlier review, this might include an exploration of practices related to father-adolescent attachment, paternal warmth and emotional availability, expressions of physical affection, communication practices, conflict management, implementation of an authoritative parenting style, and engagement in shared activities. More generally, fathers can be equipped to provide intentional investment in their daughters' lives. Similarly, men can be encouraged to avoid practices that have been associated with negative outcomes for daughters, including over-control, withdrawal/rejection, and judgmental communication.

In terms of the format or delivery of services, there is some evidence that men have a preference for treatment that is geared toward their specific needs and provided in a relaxed setting with other men (Berlyn et al., 2008; Frank et al., 2014). The qualitative study by Berlyn

et al. (2008)—frequently cited in this section—indicates that men may feel more comfortable learning about parenting topics in a setting where women are not present. Some dads indicated that this preference stems from a fear of feeling diminished or incompetent in front of their wives or other women who are present. While this is unlikely to be a concern for all fathers, men have consistently expressed a preference for settings where peer learning from other fathers is possible (Cosson & Graham, 2012; Frank et al., 2014). The fact that many fathers report negative experiences with their own fathers (Cosson & Graham, 2012; Walters, Tasker, & Bichard, 2001) may indicate that they have limited experience with positive fathering role models and can therefore benefit from intentional engagement with other men who are dedicated to improving their fathering.

Structured fathering groups provide the opportunity for peer learning and so are not overly reliant on the clinician taking on a potentially off-putting expert stance (Berlyn et al., 2008). Clinicians who participated in interviews for the Berlyn et al. study (2008) indicated that the establishment of a collaborative learning environment where fathers have an opportunity for “incidental learning” may be most conducive to men’s development (p. 40). Such a format might be especially effective for working with homogenous groups of fathers due to the fact that they are all confronting a common challenge and are collectively working toward a shared solution. This observation might be directly applied to groups whose focus is the improvement of relations with an adolescent daughter.

Whether services are provided in a group format or on an individual basis, clinicians do well to position themselves as facilitators of fathers’ personal growth. This posture presupposes the goodwill, good intentions, and innate capabilities of the fathers who are involved (Brotherson et al., 2005), while also bringing in relevant information and interventions that can contribute to

their continued growth. Coaching has already been mentioned as a metaphor that may be familiar to and readily accepted by many men (McKelley & Rochlen, 2010), and it could be a helpful way of framing the therapist's role. In addition to this, Cosson and Graham (2012) suggest that the clinician use a collaborative problem solving approach, contending that it may be a more effective way of promoting men's engagement. However it is framed, the distinctive needs and preferences of men should be seen as instrumental in guiding the development and delivery of services that are intended to promote their growth.

Finally, it is worth noting the extent to which best practice treatment recommendations align with the driving ethic of the generative fathering framework. Chapter One provided some background on the conceptual ethic of generative fathering, but it is a subject that is worthy of revisiting here. As the preceding section makes clear, the father-honoring orientation advocated by a generative fathering framework receives robust support from researchers who have identified best practices for engagement with men in the family context. When clinicians are deliberate about cultivating relationships with fathers and are explicit in conveying a high regard for the contribution they make to their children's well-being, men are more likely to take an active role in services to their children (Berlyn et al., 2008; Frank et al., 2014; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

### **Support for The Abba Project Fathering Intervention**

The previous review of services to fathers and associated barriers demonstrated the need for father-focused interventions that are developed around the needs and preferences of men. The review also served to highlight the lack of current services that are specifically designed to meet the needs of fathers who have adolescent daughters. Chapter One identified The Abba Project as a grassroots intervention that organically grew up to meet this need. The success of

this group in promoting the relationship between fathers and adolescent or young adult women makes it a prime subject for further investigation. This is particularly true with regard to the project's demonstrated ability to recruit and retain fathers in what is a relatively lengthy and involved program of engagement. Furthermore, The Abba Project conforms to many of the best practices identified in the preceding review. Despite its success, The Abba Project has received scant research attention to date. This section will offer a review of available data on The Abba Project, information on the program's marketing and retention practices, and evidence in support of its effectiveness. In reviewing these areas, particular attention will be given to identification of specific evidence-based practices that The Abba Project employs.

I became acquainted with The Abba Project after meeting and corresponding with the project's developer. The novelty and distinctive approach of the project led to a deeper investigation of its origins and outcomes. The project's founder, Dr. Michelle Watson, was unaware of any outside research that had been conducted on The Abba Project, and subsequent queries in academic databases failed to identify any studies. The absence of existing research on the project provides a basis for consideration of more exploratory methods of assessment.

Investigation of The Abba Project's approach to topics of recruitment and retention—areas that have been identified as problematic in fathering services—has been encouraging. Dr. Watson explained that recruitment for The Abba Project is conducted through word-of-mouth referrals, marketing to local faith communities, and awareness efforts centered around her own counseling practice (personal correspondence, October 8, 2016). Men who are interested in the project may or may not have a daughter who is clinically involved, and the project's fathering groups are intentionally presented as offering relational enrichment rather than therapeutic services. Fathering groups, which last an average of nine months, typically consist of eight to 12

men and are cofacilitated by Dr. Watson and a male colleague. Of the five cycles of groups conducted to date, 95% of the men who started out with the group saw it through to completion (73 of 77). Although this is a small and select sample, such retention rates are far superior to those that were earlier reported for various fathering interventions.

Existing data on the project's success comes from Dr. Watson's own evaluations (M. Watson, personal communication, August 30, 2016). She has consistently asked project participants to complete a survey of fatherhood at the beginning and at the conclusion of treatment. This data is compelling in that it indicates a number of changes on the part of fathers as they strive to connect with their daughters. Among other improvements, attitudinal and behavioral shifts are reported in the following areas: more intentional engagement (43% increase in initiating dates/fun activities), better communication (29% less frustration in communication, 39% increase in openness to disagreement, and 29% increase in openness to talking about sex with daughters), and more affirmation (40% increase in praise for character and personality, 27% increase in physical affection).

Supplementing these data are various anecdotal accounts from fathers and daughters who participated in follow-up interviews with Dr. Watson. These interviews provide intimate reports of the difference that participation in The Abba Project made in the lives of participants. Fathers indicated that they were better equipped for meaningful engagement with their daughters and were more intentional about investing in them. A number of daughters also spoke about the experience of having a father participate in the group. While these accounts were complex, they resonated with themes of initial skepticism and resistance followed by descriptions of growing intimacy and closeness. These accounts cannot and should not be idealized but they do speak to

the possibility of dramatic improvement in a relationship that is absolutely critical to both parties involved.

This combined evidence paints a picture of a promising and innovative intervention that is largely succeeding in its goal of providing fathers with information and resources that enable them to invest more intentionally and effectively in their daughter's life. At the same time, the absence of more systematic and comprehensive investigation of the project points to the need for further study. The proposed study endeavors to learn from the experiences of fathers who have participated in The Abba Project. Given the project's promise and the lack of current studies on its program model, the following quote by Holmes et al. (2010) is prescient:

Without a strong theoretical framework for why fathers matter, a collection of information about how a program successfully delivers its services, and details of how participants benefit from these efforts, excellent local work goes unseen, and other communities create programs from scratch when they could be benefiting from prior efforts. (p. 250)

The final section of this chapter will advance the case for the proposed study by exploring the ways that a heuristic approach might be used to gather information about treatment outcomes and clients' preferences for services.

### **Support for the Methodology of this Study**

Investigation of men's participation in and preferences for family-oriented services has been minimal. Therapy outcome studies have used a variety of observational and self-report data to measure changes that might be attributed to participation in therapy (McLeod, 2011). Such studies have naturally employed a quantitative methodology as they have sought to statistically measure the magnitude of treatment effects. Supplementing this statistical approach, qualitative



studies have increasingly been recognized for their ability to identify the mechanisms of change and the meanings that therapy participants ascribe to the experience. While there continues to be a need for wide-ranging study of paternal participation in family services, more focused study of the experiences of men in these settings is essential.

The central aim of the present study was to understand the lived experience of a select group of fathers who self-identified the need for an intervention designed to improve their relationship with an adolescent daughter. That purpose was best accomplished by a research approach that attended not only to the experiences of participating fathers, but also to the meanings that they associated with those experiences. That explicit purpose, coupled with the personal interest of the researcher, led to the selection of a qualitative heuristic research approach. Heuristic methodologies provide the researcher with an opportunity to interact with and contextualize the received data in a deeply personal and encompassing manner (Moustakas, 1994). The value of such an approach has been demonstrated in a number of therapy-related studies but has not yet been employed in the investigation of how fathers of adolescent daughters approach and experience therapy that is designed to promote their relationship. The ensuing paragraphs will provide a concise review of relevant qualitative studies with a view toward demonstrating the utility of this research approach for answering the present research questions.

Henwood and Procter (2003) used qualitative methods to gain an understanding of the experiences of men in their transition to first-time fatherhood. Participating fathers ( $N = 30$ ) provided in-depth accounts of their experiences. Their narratives reflected feelings of both excitement and uncertainty about this life-changing transition. The study revealed three common points of tension for first-time dads in the areas of balancing provision with physical presence, competing drives for selflessness and autonomy, and the need to negotiate equity and decision

making in the coparenting relationship. Although these research findings do not directly relate to the present research questions, they illustrate the sorts of nuanced results that can be derived from a qualitative investigation of particular fathering experiences.

Brotherson et al. (2005)—the developers of the generative fathering framework—used a quasi-phenomenological approach to investigate men’s experiences of connecting with their children. To elucidate the phenomenon of connection, the authors interviewed 16 married fathers of special-needs children, contending that this select population was particularly well positioned to speak about constructs related to paternal care and bonding. This study produced a collection of rich narratives by fathers that enabled the researchers to identify a number of prominent themes. Themes included the meaning associated with participating in shared activities, supporting children during times of distress, exchanges of time and affection, and shared participation in spiritual activities (Brotherson et al., 2005). In addition to providing general research support for the conceptual ethic of generative fathering, Brotherson et al.’s (2005) study served to enhance the understanding of men’s experiences in caring for and connecting with their children—factors that are clearly relevant to the development and implementation of more father-centric treatment interventions.

Finally, a review of a specifically heuristic study of the therapy process may help to demonstrate the distinctive contribution of this research genre. Terry and Reeves (2015) explored clinicians’ experiences with including information on diet and nutrition in the therapy process ( $N = 6$ ). Terry and Reeves considered the larger meanings associated with food and fellowship alongside of the personal perspectives of the clinicians. In keeping with a heuristic research approach, the authors maintained a position as both subjects and objects of the study—openly reflecting on their own emerging understanding of the subject of investigation. As

clinicians themselves, Terry and Reeves were able to draw from the experience of wrestling with the topic of investigation to provide a number of specific treatment recommendations.

Importantly, these recommendations were derived from an intensive process of self-reflection and immersion in the research topic. Proponents of a heuristic approach presume that such intensive personal reflection is likely to result in findings that are both personally meaningful and essentially universal (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). Using a similar research approach for the investigation of fathers' experiences in The Abba Project is anticipated to yield similarly meaningful results.

### **Summary**

In seeking to demonstrate the value of this study, this chapter surveyed a diverse body of literature. Topics included an examination of the context of fathering, research on the importance of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, interventions intended to promote this relationship, the treatment approach of The Abba Project, and an examination of various methodological approaches to the research question at hand. The literature in these areas has served to identify both the importance of the father-daughter relationship and the lack of identified treatment protocols designed to promote it. Research on effective interventions for the father/adolescent-daughter relationship remains limited, and The Abba Project stands as a promising subject for further investigation. The primary impetus in the conception and design of this study is the necessity to develop services for fathers that are sensitive to their expressed needs and preferences. The next chapter will undertake to outline the specific research approach employed in this study.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of a select group of help-seeking fathers who intentionally sought out and participated in an intervention targeted at improving their relationship with their adolescent or young adult daughter(s). A qualitative heuristic design was selected for this study because it is ideally suited to my interest in the topic and the overriding goal of deeply understanding the experiences of fathers who participated in The Abba Project.

This chapter presents a review of a number of areas that are essential to the conception and design of the study and thus builds a case for the suitability of a heuristic approach for answering the research questions. This review provides a description of the research design, an explication of relevant information about the researcher, a review of specific research questions, and an explanation of the process of selecting participants for the study. Next, the processes for data collection and analysis are outlined. Issues related to the validity, or trustworthiness, of the study are then explored. Finally, ethical considerations and involvement with the Internal Review Board (IRB) are addressed.

#### **Research Design**

Investigation of psychological phenomena and counseling practice may take a number of different avenues. Broadly speaking, research can be divided into the two camps of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative approaches are based upon a positivist philosophical orientation, are essentially reductionistic and deterministic, tend to prize the objectivity of the researcher, and strive for research findings that are valid, reliable, and generalizable (Kazdin, 2016; Lukoff & Lu, 1988; McLeod, 2011). Qualitative research, on the other hand, is grounded in existential and constructivist philosophies, affirms the inherently subjective nature of human

experience, and values the type of knowledge that is obtained through intentional reflective engagement (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997).

Writing specifically about research on counseling, McLeod (2011) asserts that there is a symbiotic, or complimentary, relationship between quantitative and qualitative research methods. He explains that while the first is particularly suited to identifying and measuring treatment effects and the relationships between variables, the second is recommended when the goal is to enhance understandings of the subjective nature of lived experience. Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, and Wang (2016) articulate the need for qualitative studies in fields where understandings remain underdeveloped. Heppner et al. (2016) go so far as to affirm, “In some cases, descriptive studies might very well yield more useful and important information than a controlled experimental investigation” (p. 17). Given the relative lack of existing research on the experiences of help-seeking fathers, qualitative methods are identified as the preferred mode for advancing understandings of how men can relate to and benefit from services that are designed to promote the father/adolescent-daughter relationship.

According to Kazdin (2016), qualitative research provides an approach to understanding human experience where the goal is to “describe, interpret, and understand the phenomena of interest” (p. 332). Expanding upon this, Patton (2002) explains that qualitative methods enable the researcher to study phenomena of interest in depth and detail while remaining a part of the investigative process. For the present study, the broader phenomenon of interest is the father/adolescent-daughter relationship. More narrowly, the focus is on the experiences of fathers who participated in an intervention intended to promote this relationship. The lack of existing treatment protocols—or even available services—for this important relationship highlights the need for a research approach that can provide both descriptive insight and

conceptual enhancement. With the generative fathering framework (Brotherson et al., 2005) as a conceptual guide, the qualitative heuristic design of the present study was developed to enhance understandings of men's experiences of fathering an adolescent daughter while at the same time allowing them to express their preferences toward services designed to support this relationship.

A further aim of the present study was to enrich understandings of the ways that men experience and overcome barriers to help seeking. This focus on praxis aligns with West's (2009) assertion that "research is about doing, and therapy research should make some contribution to better therapeutic practice" (p. 195). The insights and conceptual understandings that flowed from engagement with the co-researchers and with the wider topic of father-daughter relations hold promise for improving practices in therapeutic work with fathers.

For research questions that are focused on understanding distinctive phenomena within the human experience, Moustakas (1994) identifies qualitative methods as offering the following benefits: They more fully capture the nuance of human experience; they are better suited for the discovery of meanings and essences rather than measurement and explanation; they provide access to vivid descriptions from co-researchers; they allow for the incorporation of the passion and interest of the researcher; and they recognize the inseparability of experience and behavior. Each of these benefits directly relates to the focus and aims of the present study.

Within the qualitative cannon of psychological research, the heuristic approach is notable for the extent to which the person of the researcher is intimately involved in the process of discovery (Moustakas, 1990). In describing his own approach to heuristics, Moustakas (1990) explains: "I begin the heuristic investigation with my own self-awareness and explicate that awareness with reference to a question or problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience" (p. 11). The researcher's initial

curiosity about a phenomenon is coupled with systematic engagement—something that is accomplished by a deep personal encounter with the phenomenon and ongoing dialogue with select individuals who are able to reflect meaningfully on the phenomenon.

The deeply personal nature of the father-daughter relationship for this researcher and the opportunity to dialogue with research participants who are uniquely positioned to speak to the phenomenon were primary factors in the selection of a heuristic design. Although it may be seen as broadly phenomenological in its approach, heuristic research is unique (Moustakas, 1994). Whereas phenomenological approaches generally attempt to bracket out the person of the researcher in a manner that facilitates objective description or explanation of an external phenomenon, the total immersion of the researcher in the topic of investigation characterizes heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990). This difference is based upon an assumption that the researcher's personal engagement with the subject of investigation is fundamental to the process of discovery.

As Moustakas (1990) explains, "Heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (p. 11). Although the total person of the researcher remains intimately involved throughout the duration of the investigative process, it is important for the researcher to both identify and articulate his preconceived notions toward the phenomenon of interest before the investigation begins (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). This step, known as phenomenological reduction (van Manen, 1997) or the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994), enables the researcher to set aside preexisting understandings or prejudices about the topic of investigation so that they are more fully capable of a fresh encounter with the phenomenon as it presents itself. Toward that

end, the next section provides a description of this researcher's interest, experience, and preexisting biases toward the topic of father-daughter relations.

### **About the Researcher**

I am the father of three young daughters. This personal reality is most immediate and pressing in driving my interest in the father-daughter bond. At the time of this writing, my girls are 9, 8, and 4 years old. I have greatly enjoyed being a father to these girls throughout their childhood, but I look to their approaching adolescence with a mixture of excitement and uncertainty. I was and am eager to learn from the experiences of fathers who have already walked this road and have deliberately sought out services to help them do it more effectively.

While my interest in this topic began as a personal one, my growing acquaintance with the literature on fatherhood continues to leave me intrigued by the potential benefits that are associated with intentional and engaged fathering. The extent to which this potential remains unrealized is a significant concern. The consequence of that untapped potential was made real for me by my previous work as a licensed marriage and family therapist. During 6 years of clinical involvement with a therapeutic foster-care program, I had an opportunity to provide in-home and office-based therapy to a wide range of clients and their families. That role provided an open window through which I could observe the reality of father absence and its impact on the lives of dozens of young boys and girls. One particular family session stands out. I remember being struck by the realization that the father in attendance was the first dad who had been present in my office for more than a year.

In coping with those experiences at the time, my tendency was to alternate between judgment and lament: focusing on the failures of under-involved fathers while being overwhelmed by the devastation that I saw in the lives of their children. While such a view



follows naturally from a prolonged proximity to a disturbing reality, the negative focus that it promotes is a clear example of what Brotherson et al. (2005) termed a *deficit perspective* of fathering (p. 6). Such perspectives tend to marginalize fathers rather than support their greater involvement.

In contrast with such a view, my present emphasis has shifted to one of engagement: seeking to understand ways that men can be empowered to more fully actualize the potential that they possess as fathers. I recognize that my own failure to seek out and engage with the fathers of my clients was indicative of a larger trend in the field—one that is exhibited in the research literature. While I acknowledge that there are broader sociocultural factors that must be taken into account, the importance of hearing directly from fathers about what they want and need from family service providers is evident. Examining the accounts of fathers who managed to overcome the multiple barriers to help seeking should provide clues about how fathers can be more actively recruited and more consistently retained in services that are designed to promote their involvement with adolescent daughters.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions served as a guide for this exploration of fathers' experiences with an intervention targeted toward improving their relationship with their adolescent or young adult daughter(s):

1. What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter?
  - a. How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?
2. How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking?

3. How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention?
4. How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group?
5. How would they say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?
6. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters?

These questions were answered as I engaged in semi-structured interviews with fathers who participated in The Abba Project. Adherence to an interview guide drawn directly from the questions articulated above (see Appendix A) maintained the focus for these interviews.

### **Selection of Participants**

In heuristic or phenomenological research, participants are commonly referred to as co-researchers. This designation reflects the extent to which researchers rely upon participants as “experts” on the phenomenon under investigation. Moustakas (1990) provided a rich description of the place of the co-researcher in heuristic investigation: “Only the experiencing persons—by looking at their own experiences in perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sense—can validly provide portrayals of the experience. If one is to know and understand another’s experience, one must converse directly with the person” (p. 26). Given the researcher’s profound reliance on the expertise of study participants, it is essential for the researcher to seek out and enlist individuals who are able to speak meaningfully about the topic being investigated. In heuristic research, sampling is done in a purposive way, meaning that individuals are identified for participation in a

study because they have distinctive or unique experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2008).

For this study, fathers who participated in The Abba Project were identified as co-researchers. Creswell (2017) explains that criterion sampling is recommended when “all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 155). Because this study was interested in the experiences of help-seeking fathers, participants in The Abba Project were an ideal criterion sample.

Whereas quantitative studies set out to obtain a sample size that will allow for the detection of meaningful relationships between variables, qualitative studies focus on achieving a saturation of data that relates to emergent themes. Data saturation is understood to have occurred once categories and themes are determined to be robust, adequately explicated by existing data, and when existing properties have sufficiently accounted for patterns in the data (Charmaz, 2014; Glasser, 1978). Depending upon the specific qualitative research approach employed, Polkinghorne (1989) has suggested that data saturation can normally be achieved with between five and 25 participants. For heuristics, Moustakas (1990) suggests a sample of 10 to 15 participants and specifies that each participant should be engaged in extensive and lengthy conversational interviews.

After obtaining IRB approval, and based on the above noted recommendations, I enlisted the participation of 11 co-researchers. Since data saturation was achieved at this point, I did not proceed with any further recruitment efforts, though I did go forward with completing interviews and collecting data from all fathers who responded to the initial recruitment request. Ultimately, 13 fathers provided some amount of data for this study. Eleven fathers were selected from

among this group based upon the relevance of their experiences and their ability to speak most meaningfully to the topic of investigation.

I conducted recruitment of study participants through coordination with The Abba Project founder and facilitator, Dr. Michelle Watson. Because the focus of this study was on fathers of adolescent daughters, the recruitment appeal was extended only to fathers whose daughters were adolescents (under 20 years of age) at the time of their participation in The Abba Project (Recruitment Letter, see Appendix B). The interviews for participants who were included in this study were completed between January 2 and February 1, 2017. I had an initial phone call with each of the participants to clarify the voluntary nature of the study and to provide basic information about the background, purpose, and commitment involved. I sent a follow-up letter, including information on informed consent (see Appendix C) and a demographic survey (see Appendix D), to interested fathers. In order to incentivize participation in this study, fathers who participated in all phases of the study received a \$50 Amazon gift card.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This section provides an overview of data collection and analysis procedures.

#### **Data Collection**

Fathers who expressed an interest in participating in this study were contacted briefly by phone to ensure that they had a good understanding of the purpose of the study and of what participation would involve. This also allowed fathers to ask any questions about the study and about their participation. Those who indicated a willingness to participate were sent a link that provided them access to an electronic version of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) and Demographic Survey (see Appendix D). The survey consisted of 14 items that covered a range of topics, including the participants' age, religious affiliation, marital status, years married

(if applicable), number and ages of children, age of daughter or daughters for whom participation in The Abba Project was sought, and Likert scale ratings for relationship quality with the father's own father, along with ratings for before and after participation in The Abba Project. Because the study was interested in understanding the ways that help-seeking fathers have overcome barriers to participation in a family-focused intervention, the study also sought information on the fathers' attitudes toward participation in family-focused therapeutic services.

Fathers who elected to participate in this study received a Journaling Prompt (see Appendix E) which corresponded to the semi-structured Interview Guide (see Appendix A). Interviews were typically scheduled at least 1 week later so that participants had adequate time to contemplate the questions and to write out their thoughts before the interview. This technique served as a way to prime fathers for participation in the interview. Some of the fathers did not write out any thoughts prior to the interview but did subsequently send along notes on the Journal Prompt. Due to my distance from the co-researchers, interviews were conducted and recorded through WebEx. This Internet-based videoconferencing platform allowed for synchronous engagement with the study participants. I requested that participants join the WebEx meeting using a reliable Internet connection, a web camera, and a phone. This arrangement allowed participants to partake in the interviews in a natural setting where they could feel comfortable (Creswell, 2017).

The primary data for this study was drawn from these semi-structured interviews with fathers who participated in The Abba Project. Patton (2002) describes three approaches to qualitative interviewing. In order of formality, with least structured approaches listed first, these are: the informal conversational interview (spontaneous questions and conversation, characterized by unfolding dialogue), the general interview guide (set of issues or topics covered

with all participants), and the standard open-ended interview (specifically worded questions addressed to all participants). Moustakas (1990) suggested that a conversational approach is most conducive to the heuristic aim of promoting thoughtful disclosure and elucidation of the experiences investigated. Because the present study focused on particular aspects of the participants' fathering experiences, I used a loose interview guide. This served to ensure that all relevant areas of investigation could be covered, while also allowing for spontaneous exploration of distinctive aspects of each participant's experience (McLeod, 2011).

Moustakas (1990) recommends that qualitative interviews not be "ruled by the clock" but instead focus on allowing each research participant "an opportunity to tell his . . . story to a point of natural closing" (p. 46). Interviews typically lasted for 50 to 75 minutes and were video recorded. This provided sufficient time for me to dialogue with each research participant in a comprehensive manner about the full range of topics outlined on the interview guide, and I used the video recordings to transcribe the interviews. Once the transcriptions were complete, I made extensive notes on each transcript, highlighting significant portions, making speculative observations, and offering follow-up questions. These were returned to the participants by email, and participants were asked to respond to, correct, and expand upon their original transcript. This step in the research process allowed for interactive member checking as participants continued to offer written dialogue on the topics that were covered by or raised in the interview. Along with this feedback, participants emailed me their written responses on the Journaling Prompt.

**Data Analysis**

Moustakas (1990) outlines eight procedures for heuristic data analysis. This section will provide a brief overview of each step, followed by an articulation of how the data was analyzed for the present study.

Steps one through five involve the researcher carefully reviewing, assimilating, and working up a composite depiction of the experiences of research participants one at a time. The first step simply involves the collection and organization of data from each participant. Once materials are assembled, the next step calls for an immersion in the experience of each participant. Following this step of immersion, the researcher sets aside the data for a period of time. This interval of rest allows for internal processing and intuitive understanding of the data to take hold. Out of this introspective process, the researcher proceeds with an identification of central themes and representative narratives that can be developed into a composite depiction of the participant's experience. This depiction should retain both the language of the participant and specific examples that serve to illustrate the core elements of their experience. Supplementing this, the researcher documents the range of qualities and themes that emerged from his or her own internal processing of the data.

Once the first five steps are completed, the researcher is ready to analyze the collected data as a whole. Similar to steps three and four described above, the sixth step calls for alternating periods of immersion and rest as the researcher works to more deeply and fully assimilate and comprehend the total experiences of the research participants as a group. This second immersion in the totality of the data results in the production of a collective depiction of the composite data. This depiction should be vivid, acute, and clear—infused with narrative, description, illustrations, and verbatim excerpts from the participants. The seventh step mirrors

the fourth, with the distinction that it is applied to the composite depiction rather than individual accounts. At this point, the researcher revisits the totality of the raw data in order to validate and assess the accuracy of the distilled essences compiled from the participants' collective accounts. Finally, with step eight, the process culminates in a creative synthesis of the analyzed data. Moustakas (1990) explains that this final step is characterized by considerable freedom on the part of the researcher as he strives to produce "an aesthetic rendition of the themes and essential meanings of the phenomenon" (p. 52).

My own approach to the process of data analysis closely followed the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1990) and articulated above. For the first step of data collection, I assembled demographic surveys, recordings, and transcriptions of interviews, journals, and any other personal documentation that the participants provided. Next, I immersed myself in the data by repeatedly viewing and reading transcripts of the individual interviews. I reviewed supplemental data alongside of the transcripts so that each participant's experience could be comprehensively apprehended as a whole and in its detail (Moustakas, 1990, p. 51). Next, I took an interval of rest and reflection so that themes and impressions from the data were allowed to emerge and crystalize. I did not have a set amount of time in mind for this step, but I took at least a few days for interaction with and retreat from direct interaction with each participant's data.

These periods of rest allowed the data to "incubate" as I entered into a process of intuitive assimilation and comprehension of the data. Incubation allowed me to develop a composite depiction of each individual father's experience. Once individual member-checking processes were completed and I had sufficient time for assimilation and rest, I assembled a collective depiction of the fathers' accounts for further reflection and review. Moustakas (1990) explains



that by alternating periods of immersion and rest, “the universal qualities and themes of the experience are thoroughly internalized and understood” (p. 52). Intuition and deep personal processing guided this phase of the data analysis process. In order to help facilitate this, I maintained ongoing consultation with my faculty advisor during this sixth step. After assembling a composite depiction of the co-researchers’ experiences, I submitted this total product to the research participants for a second review. Once the co-researchers and I were satisfied that this composite depiction provided a true description of their experiences, I undertook the development of a creative synthesis of the phenomenon. That synthesis is presented in Chapter 4.

### **Trustworthiness**

Qualitative studies derive their credibility from the trustworthiness of the research process and resulting findings (Erford, 2015). Speaking directly to the validity of heuristic studies, Moustakas (1990) explains that the “question of validity is one of meaning: Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derive from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?” (p. 33). Looking at the topic more systematically, Guba and Lincoln (2005) assert that qualitative studies achieve trustworthiness by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these areas and their relationship to the present study will be treated in turn.

Credibility refers to the extent to which a study’s findings are believable and logically derived from the data obtained (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). For the present study, credibility was achieved through triangulation and prolonged engagement with the research topic. Triangulation involves the collection of diverse data from multiple sources (Denzin, 2009). To supplement

data from the semi-structured interviews, I collected and reviewed participant journals and transcript notes and engaged in prolonged, intensive, and deliberate immersion in the data.

Qualitative research is considered transferable when findings can be generalized to other settings and contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Providing detailed descriptions of the research process enhances transferability. These descriptions may include information on the experiences or circumstances of the research participants, steps taken to obtain and process data, and the provision of rich, or “thick,” narratives derived from the raw data provided by participants. I endeavored to promote the transferability of this study by meeting each of these criteria as outlined in the section on data analysis.

The dependability of qualitative research findings is based on “the consistency of the results over time and across researchers” (Erford, 2015, p. 103). Dependability is promoted through attention to the same practices that promote a study’s credibility, with the additional recommendation that researchers seek out consultation during the research process and compare their findings with existing theory and research. This study achieved dependability through my ongoing consultation with my academic advisor and my continued examination of pertinent research literature. The relative lack of studies that are specific to the experiences of fathers who participated in an intervention designed to promote their relationship to their adolescent daughters does place the present study on the exploratory rather than confirmatory end of the research spectrum. Nevertheless, relevant research findings were continually reviewed with a view toward understanding how they might inform and ground the data obtained in the present study.

Finally, the construct of confirmability “assumes that the findings of the study [are] genuinely reflective of the participants’ perspectives within the context of their natural

environment” (Erford, 2015, p. 103). After participant data were assimilated and analyzed, emergent themes were submitted to the research participants for further review. This member-checking process allows participants to confirm, challenge, and expand on the data. In speaking of this process, Moustakas (1990) writes that research findings can be

enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy. (pp. 34-35)

Creswell (2017) further explains that researchers’ bracketing their own preconceptions and experience with or bias toward the topic of investigation confirms qualitative research findings. In following this directive, I provided a review of my interest and history with the topic of research in the above section entitled “About the Researcher.” I also maintained a personal research journal to document and monitor my thoughts on the topic as the study unfolded.

### **Ethics**

Researchers are ethically bound to weigh the anticipated risks of a study against the potential benefits that it offers (Kazdin, 2016). Specific areas of ethical concern can be identified by considering the risks associated with the type of research conducted, the topic of investigation, and the specific procedures employed. In order to help identify and mitigate the risks associated with this study, IRB approval was obtained prior to any contact with study participants. For the present study, the following ethical issues were identified: maintaining confidentiality of participant information, engaging participants in dialogue on a topic that may be disruptive or unsettling, and maintaining a balance between my roles as researcher and co-

discoverer (Creswell, 2017; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2006; McLeod, 2011).

Participant information included a demographic survey, personal journals on the research topic, and recordings of interviews. In order to safeguard the identity of the co-researchers, I asked each participant to select a pseudonym, which I used throughout the process of data collection and in the narrative descriptions of research findings provided in Chapter Four of this dissertation. I also stored all study-related materials in either a locked filing cabinet or a password-protected computer data file. In keeping with federal guidelines, all digital recordings were destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

By virtue of participation in The Abba Project, there is an implication that each study participant experienced some level of frustration or strain in his relationship with his daughter. Although these relationships generally benefited from the fathers' treatment involvement, participation in a study of this experience had the potential to be disruptive—awakening any unsettled relational issues and bringing renewed attention to lingering strain. This dynamic is a recognized challenge in qualitative research on the counseling process (Heppner et al., 2016; McLeod, 2011) and is balanced against findings that speak to the potential benefit that study participants may derive from research participation (Dyregrov et al., 2011; Murray, 2003). The potential risks and benefits of this study were articulated in the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) that was presented to interested participants. Furthermore, participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions or get clarification on information in the informed consent document prior to signing this form. Participants were apprised of the voluntary nature of the study and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without fear of reprisal. Finally, had participants displayed significant disturbance and/or a desire for help, I

was prepared to provide them with local support and referral information. No participants asked for assistance, nor did any participants appear to become emotionally dysregulated to the point that assistance was required.

A final ethical consideration had to do with the boundary blurring that can occur between researchers and study participants (Dickinson-Swift et al., 2006). With its emphasis on shared meaning and co-discovery, heuristics investigation requires deep and abiding collaboration between the researcher and participating co-researchers. In describing this, Moustakas (1990) explains that heuristic research calls for “cooperative sharing in which co-researchers and primary researchers open pathways to each other for explicating the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 47). Because the establishment of an open and collaborative dialogue between the primary researcher and study participants is the premise of heuristic research, rapport takes on a special importance. Drawing from their own qualitative investigation of 30 qualitative health researchers, Dickinson-Swift et al. (2006) found rapport may be enhanced through measured but appropriate self-disclosure. My personal passion for and abiding interest in the topic of this research was a critical component of the present study. I sought to use appropriate self-disclosure at times in order to engender deeper reflection and self-searching on the part of the research participants. In order to minimize any threats to prescribed relational boundaries that may have resulted from intensive collaboration with study participants, I participated in ongoing consultation with a faculty advisor.

### **Summary**

The proposed study was conceived out of a developing understanding of the importance of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship and the startling recognition of how few services are intentionally designed to support this relationship. While this awareness served to illustrate a

meaningful need in the broader field of family-focused therapy, it was an encounter with The Abba Project treatment model that spurred a specific curiosity about this program's promise and value as a subject of study.

This chapter provided an overview of the qualitative heuristic approach selected for this study. This chapter included relevant information about the researcher in order to clarify and bracket my experience with the topic of investigation. Specific research questions guiding the study were presented. This was followed by a description of the process of selecting participants and the procedures for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data. Finally, this chapter touched on issues related to the trustworthiness of the study and areas of anticipated ethical concern— noting the important role that the IRB approval process played in mitigating the identified ethical risks. The next chapter will present this study's findings, particularly as they demonstrate how the participants' experiences answer the research questions articulated in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

This heuristic study sought to shed light on the father/adolescent-daughter relationship by examining the experiences of fathers who participated in a structured intervention designed to promote the relationship. Information from 11 fathers who participated in the intervention was obtained through semistructured interviews, personal journals, and ongoing correspondence with the researcher. The researcher recorded and transcribed participant interviews. Chapter Three provided a detailed summary of the process by which data was gathered, recorded, and analyzed. In keeping with heuristic-phenomenological methods of analysis, the data followed an eight-step procedure that was recommended by Moustakas (1990). In brief, this process involved an isolated review of each participant's data, followed by a first round of member checking with that participant. Once this was completed, a composite depiction of the data and emergent themes was presented to all participants for a second review. Through collaboration with the co-researchers, major themes and subthemes for each research question were identified and confirmed. A review of the organization and progression of the study helps to place the current chapter in context.

Chapter One of this dissertation provided an orientation to the topic of fathering an adolescent daughter and participation in an intervention designed to promote this relationship by reviewing the background of the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, and the research approach that was employed. This served to identify both the gaps in current research and the need for an enriched understanding of the experiences of help-seeking fathers of adolescent daughters. The second chapter grounded the study in existing research by reviewing a diverse body of literature that has direct relevance to the father/adolescent-daughter relationship and men's help-seeking experiences. Chapter Three presented information about

this study's design, research questions, participant selection, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter Three also addressed issues related to the ethics and trustworthiness of the study.

This chapter presents the findings that emerged through intensive engagement with the co-researchers on the topics of fathering an adolescent daughter and participation in a fathering intervention. McLeod (2011) explains that qualitative studies on counseling and psychotherapy acquire validity by presenting the findings in context. To accomplish this, demographic information on study participants as a group and as individuals is included. This is followed by an articulation of themes that emerged from interaction with the co-researchers around the six research questions that were explored.

### **Participants**

This section provides demographic information on the 11 fathers who participated in this study.

#### **Demographic Information**

Eleven co-researchers were selected for participation in this study. All 11 of these men participated in The Abba Project fathering intervention and completed informed consent paperwork prior to participating in the study. All co-researchers had daughters between the ages of 13 and 19 when they participated in The Abba Project. Although some of the fathers had multiple daughters who benefited from the intervention, they each selected a single daughter as the primary focus for the intervention. The average age of these daughters was 15.9 years.

Each of the fathers has between two and four children: five of the fathers have two children, two have three children, and three have four children. Four of the 11 fathers have more than one daughter, and 10 of the 11 also had at least one son. This feature is important, because



it allowed the fathers an opportunity to compare their experience of fathering children of both genders. Eight of the fathers are currently married and their daughters were residing with them at the time of their participation in The Abba Project. The average number of years of marriage for the eight married fathers was 26.7. Two of the fathers are divorced and had shared custody during The Abba Project. Neither of them is remarried. One father is a widower, having lost his wife in the month prior to his participation in the intervention.

All the fathers reside in the Pacific Northwest, which was also the location where The Abba Project took place. The co-researchers ranged in age from 44 to 60, with a median age of 52.8. They were a homogenous group in terms of race/ethnicity and religious affiliation. Ten of the fathers identified as Caucasian, and one identified as First Nations/American Indian. All of them indicated their religious affiliation as Christian (four as Protestant, six as nondenominational, and one as Foursquare Church, Christian faith). These men are a highly educated group and are employed in advanced professional settings. All of them have at least some college or specialized professional training (five hold a master's degree, four hold a bachelor's degree, one has an associate's degree, and one is a certified public accountant [CPA]). Table 4.1 provides a summary of general demographic information.

Table 4.1

*General Participant Demographics*

Variable	<i>N</i> = 11
Father's age	
44-50	4
51-55	3
56-60	4
Age (during participation) of the daughter who was the focus of the intervention	
13-14	3
15-16	3
17-19	5
Marital status	
Married	8
Divorced	2
Widowed	1
Years married	<i>n</i> = 9
18-24	4
25-30	2
31-38	3
Father's level of education	
Professional training	1
Associate's degree	1
Bachelor's degree	4
Master's degree	5
Father's race/ethnicity	
Caucasian	10
First Nations/American Indian	1
Religious affiliation	
Christian (Protestant)	4
Christian (Nondenominational)	6
Christian (Other)	1
Number of children	
2	5
3	2
4	4
Number of daughters	
1	7
2	2
3	2

Because a focus of this study was family therapy or family services, information on the father's prior involvement with counseling services was collected. Nine of the 11 fathers had some previous counseling experience. While this was largely a matter of involvement with treatment for their daughters, some of them also participated in individual and/or marital counseling. When asked about their attitudes toward participating in a family-oriented intervention, four of the fathers indicated that they were "Very Open," four were "Somewhat Open," and three were "Somewhat Reluctant." All fathers participated in The Abba Project within the last six years. Because the group meets for nine months and spans multiple years, measuring the time since participation was imprecise. Nevertheless, the average number of years since participation in The Abba Project was calculated to be 2.7 years.

As an exploratory item on the demographic survey, fathers were asked to rate their relationship to their own father (or stepfather if he became involved in their lives at an early age and was their primary father figure) using a 10-point Likert scale. Separate scores were collected for the father's ratings during childhood/adolescence and during adulthood. A score of 10 indicated that the relationship was very good, and a score of 1 indicated that it was very poor. The median score for childhood/adolescent ratings was 6.2, and the median score for the current relationship (or adult rating if the father was deceased) was 7. A similar 10-point Likert scale before-and-after score was requested for fathers' ratings of their relationship to the daughter who was the focus of their participation in the intervention. The median rating prior to participation in The Abba Project was 6.1, and the median score after participation was 8.3, resulting in a median improvement of 2.2 points. In all but one case the fathers' ratings indicated that the relationship improved after participating in The Abba Project.

To supplement this general demographic information, the following section provides a brief narrative sketch of each of the 11 participants. This supplemental information includes each father's age, marital status, profession, educational background, number of children, and the years they participated in The Abba Project. In addition to this, a concise description of the circumstances that spurred the father's involvement in The Abba Project and pertinent information on the state of his relationship with the daughter who was the focus of the intervention is presented. Where relevant, these demographic depictions include language or quotes drawn directly from the data. To maintain the anonymity of study participants, pseudonyms for fathers and daughters are used throughout this chapter. Supplemental demographic information is included in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Supplemental Demographic Information*

Variable	N = 11
Years of participation in The Abba Project	
2011-2012	3
2012-2013	1
2013-2014	2
2014-2015	2
2015-2016	3
Prior participation in counseling/family services	
Yes	9
No	2
Attitude toward services prior to participation in the intervention	
Very open to participate in services	4
Somewhat open to participate in services	4
Somewhat reluctant to participate in services	3
Relationship rating prior to participation in the intervention	
2-4	3
5-7	5
8-9	3
Relationship rating after participation in the intervention (current relationship)	
2-4	0
5-7	2
8-9	9
Relationship rating for own father in childhood/adolescence	
1-4	3
5-7	3
8-10	5
Relationship rating for own father/stepfather currently	
1-4	2
5-7	3
8-10	6

**Individual Participants**

**David.** David (age 60) participated in The Abba Project 5 years ago. He has been married for 38 years. He holds a bachelor's degree and works as the senior sales manager for a company involved in the automobile industry. David is the father of four children: two sons, ages 31 and 28, and two daughters, ages 33 and 25. He is also a grandfather of six. His

relationship with his youngest daughter, Rachel, is what prompted him to become involved in The Abba Project.

David described his relationships with his two daughters as special and different from the relationships he has enjoyed with his two sons. He explained that his father/daughter relationships were more affectionate and mentioned his wonder at seeing each daughter “blossoming [into] a young lady.” At the same time, David explained that middle school and high school were difficult times in his relationships with both daughters due to the rebelliousness that each displayed. Although he always had a “decent relationship” with his daughter Rachel during childhood, David reflected that Rachel’s issues with “insecurity and self-esteem” left her vulnerable to an unhealthy relationship with a boyfriend. This relationship became a major source of conflict in the home and was particularly troublesome to David’s relationship with Rachel. David’s strong desire to protect his daughter was repeatedly frustrated due to Rachel’s deception and poor choices. These behaviors became serious enough that David and his wife made the decision to send Rachel to a residential program during her junior year of high school. David’s participation in The Abba Project began after this step. He indicated that he was “grasping for things at the time with all that was going on” and “was willing to try anything to help build a relationship and get my daughter back.”

Although the relationship has continued to experience some challenges, David characterized his current relationship with Rachel, now 25 years old, in much more positive terms. After years of intentional investment in Rachel through regular dates, notes, and phone calls, David described the current relationship as one where his daughter frequently visits the home and is often the initiator of contact through texts and phone calls. Though David stated that he “wouldn’t wish what happened to our family on my worst enemy,” he and his wife have

been able to use what they have learned from the experience to serve as “a sounding board” for other couples who are in the midst of similar challenges.

**Brad.** Brad (53) has been married for 25 years. He participated in The Abba Project just over a year ago. He holds a master’s degree and works as a business analyst with an information technology firm. Brad has four teenage children: two daughters, ages 18 and 16, and two sons, ages 15 and 13. Brad became involved with The Abba Project due to difficulties in his relationship with his second daughter, Alyssa.

Brad explained that his relationship to Alyssa was markedly different from his relationship with his first daughter right from the beginning. He elaborated by saying:

The first one was so easy, and I thought, “Hey, great, I got this whole parenting thing figured out.” We had our second and the bus hit me, realizing that they are not the same person. Entirely different personalities. And it’s changed my whole world about how to relate to them and, you know, I’m still struggling . . . to keep them separate.

The stage was set for these early challenges in Brad’s relationship to Alyssa by the fact that she had repeated ear infections during her first year of life. She eventually had tubes put in her ears to take care of the problem. He described the heartache he experienced in being unable to console his daughter during this time.

Brad’s relationship with Alyssa has always been more challenging, and he attributed this to her having an independent will and “a strong moral fiber of who she is.” This trait led to considerable strain in adolescence as parental authority and control held less sway and Alyssa increasingly sought to be independent from her parents’ direction and discipline. Brad reflected on this stage by stating, “You kind of try to pick your battles. What was important for me to fight for? I just kind of feel like I had a progressive series of failures with her.” Alyssa was 14

when these power struggles became most acute, and that was what led Brad to participate in The Abba Project. Although this relationship continues to be difficult at times, Brad explained that he is now more flexible and open in his approach to this daughter. He indicated that this is creating new possibilities for communication and connection.

**Chris.** Chris participated in The Abba Project between 2015 and 2016. He is 49 years old and has been married for 23 years. Chris attended a premier military academy and later served as an officer in the Army. After leaving the military, he obtained an MBA from an Ivy League school, and he is currently the vice president of operations for a supply company. Chris has a 17-year-old daughter and a 13-year-old son. He became involved with The Abba Project when his daughter, Cate, began to have issues with delinquency, self-injury, and disordered eating.

Chris explained that these issues emerged after the family moved back to Oregon from the East Coast. He now sees this transition as being more of a challenge for his daughter than originally anticipated. Chris spoke powerfully about the challenges of fatherhood by contrasting his relationship to his daughter with other areas of personal and professional success:

So for an individual like myself, I went to West Point and led people into combat. I have done, some people would say, exceptionally well with what I've been involved with in a variety of businesses. It was a very humbling experience to see something within the four walls of your home basically crumble.

Things came to a head for Chris when Cate's issues with self-injury and pathological eating became more serious. He reflected on his motivation for participation in The Abba Project by stating, "I knew the fear that I had, you know, like am I going to come home and find my daughter laying on the bathroom floor with no pulse . . . or whatever scenario you can



conjure up.” Chris shared that his difficulties in relating to Cate were partly a result of their very different personalities. While Chris is an engineer by training, Cate is very artistic. She is currently applying to top college arts programs. He explained that he has been very intentional in learning about Cate’s strengths and investing in his relationship with her. He credited these efforts as providing some common ground that has led to a better relationship with Cate. Chris mentioned his efforts to increase the ratio of positive versus corrective messages in his communication with Cate as extremely important. Beyond this, he was surprised by the impact that sharing about his own life and experience had in creating a greater openness in Cate.

**James.** James was involved with The Abba Project in 2015 and 2016. He has been married for 18 years and is 46 years old. He holds a master’s degree and is a senior partner with an executive leadership firm. James also works directly with clients as an executive coach. He has two children, a daughter who is 14 and a son who is 11. James was among a unique group of fathers who became involved with The Abba Project at a time when his daughter was relatively young (13) and was not experiencing any specific difficulty. He is personally acquainted with Dr. Watson, and she invited him to be a part of The Abba Project.

James explained that his relationship with his daughter, Anna, has always been special. He attributes this, in part, to the fact that she was born after some initial challenges with infertility. James shared his concerns related to engaging his daughter on complex topics. This fear was in stark contrast to James’s confidence in confronting the high-level executives with whom he works. He explained:

It’s not like I’m afraid to lean into the tough conversations, but when it’s my own kid it’s different because it’s not a business transaction. If I’m coaching a president on reducing the size of his workforce or something, if it doesn’t go exactly as planned, nobody dies. I

generally don't get fired. But this is my kid. I can't screw this one up. The pressure feels different. I think that it's almost like I don't want to screw it up, so I just won't say anything. And that's something that [Dr. Watson] says: A lot of guys would rather do nothing at all than do something wrong. And that's 100-percent true.

Although Anna is now only 14, James noted that his relationship to her has changed with adolescence. As she has gravitated more toward peers, he has taken steps to learn about her world and actively pursues the relationship through scheduled one-on-one time and regular texts. James indicated that he was happy to have an opportunity to participate in The Abba Project at the time in Anna's life when he did, stating, "I feel really blessed that I got in early." He credited the group with giving him insight into his daughter's experience and helping him to see the importance of seeking reconciliation and connection when the relationship gets off track.

**Craig.** Craig was involved in The Abba Project about three years ago. He was the youngest father to participate in this study at 44 years of age, and he has been married for 20 years. Craig has a seminary master's degree and spent 20 years working in educational leadership. He is currently the executive director of a local non-profit which serves vulnerable children and their families. Like James, Craig became involved with The Abba Project as a proactive step when his daughter, Karen, was just 13 years old. Karen is now 16 and her brother is 9. Craig was personally invited to participate in The Abba Project by Dr. Michelle Watson due to his familiarity with curricular design and various learning environments. Despite the unique circumstances surrounding his recruitment for the group, Craig indicated that he benefited from his participation in The Abba Project.

Due to some challenges with fertility and several unsuccessful pregnancies, Karen was an only child for six-and-a-half years. These circumstances served to enhance the extent to which

Craig and his wife viewed Karen as a great gift. In the years when Karen was an only child, Craig and his wife saw her as “their entertainment” and “their world.” Unlike many of the other fathers in the study, Craig shared that his relationship with Karen has been characterized by great continuity—even as she has entered adolescence. He credited this to Karen being “aware and mature and people smart.” Even though he has always had a strong and open relationship with Karen, Craig indicated that The Abba Project raised his awareness about the importance of continuing engagement with his daughter. He described his daughter’s eagerness for one-on-one dates and between-session assignments. Demonstrating this, he described one date which his daughter suggested take place at a local dog park:

We went to the dog park, and here is my daughter, and we’re playing with the dog in the dog park, and I realized that she had her piece of paper kind of spooled up like a scroll in her hand. She was hanging onto that thing. She was eager to sit down and talk through her responses to those things [structured questions assigned in The Abba Project]. I thought she was going to be . . . I just anticipated reluctance, or this will be weird. And it was so cute because I remember she’d written it in red Sharpie, big red letters. And you know, it was awesome.

**Shawn.** Shawn (53) has a bachelor’s degree and currently works in both sales management and leadership development. He has been married for 25 years. Shawn has two children: a son who is 21 years old, and a daughter, Sophia, who is 19. He became involved with The Abba Project in 2013-2014 following a time of increased defiance by Sophia. In Shawn’s words, “She was struggling and I was having a hard time reaching her and connecting with her.”

After he completed The Abba Project, Sophia’s behavioral challenges and self-endangering choices became significant enough that Shawn and his wife made the difficult

decision to send her to a therapeutic boarding school out of state. Although Shawn attributed a lot of positive gains to The Abba Project, he credited Sophia's time in boarding school as being the decisive step:

It really wasn't The Abba Project that got my daughter and [me] to be as close as we are today. But she needed a wake-up call, and we needed to give her a hard one. And that was harder on us than it was on her.

Since returning from the boarding school, Sophia is relating to both parents much more positively. In reflecting on what he learned from The Abba Project, Shawn mentioned that it was important for him to acquire both new tools and relevant insights. His description of these insights helps to illustrate the value that this held for him:

Even for me to learn what my daughter was thinking about; when she says this, this is what she might mean. And how to read some of those signals, and how to kind of get to her in a loving way . . . which I would have never thought of. For me it was a really positive piece of helping to understand this 15-year-old brain that is not fully developed. And what they might be thinking or talking about is so irrational, but I want to know the reason why, if I can find out. And that helped me a ton, with even just knowing what I was dealing with. That was huge for me.

Interestingly, Shawn mentioned that much of what he learned through The Abba Project has also proven beneficial to his relationship with his wife

**Gary.** Gary (51) participated in The Abba Project 2 years ago. He works in a senior position with the federal government and holds a master's degree. Gary has a daughter, Julia, who is 15 years old, and sons who are 14 and 12. He became involved with The Abba Project shortly after his divorce from his children's mother. Gary learned about The Abba Project

through a feature on local television that aired on Father's Day in 2014. He responded to this television feature by contacting Dr. Watson via email and later by phone. Gary shared that his divorce and the changes that it brought to his relationship with Julia were the primary factors in his interest in The Abba Project:

Unfortunately, when she was 12, her mother and I got a divorce. And that really did change the dynamics of our relationship. I think up to that point, it was still . . . being with dad all the time . . . and then, unfortunately the divorce happened, that bifurcation. It pulled us apart a little bit. Our relationship is definitely different. It's not as close as it was. And I guess that was another reason for wanting to take the class. We still had a great relationship, it was just different. It had changed since the divorce. It was just kind of dealing with our new paradigm that we both now live in. I just wanted to make sure that that relationship . . . I needed . . . I wanted to learn as much about it, through research, through this class, as to how we could strengthen that foundation not just for now, but really 20, 30, 40 years down the road to make sure that we keep that good relationship.

Since participating in The Abba Project, Gary has maintained involvement in Julia's life through routine engagement, and especially through his role as a coach and conditioning trainer for her competitive softball team. Along with this, he mentioned religious activities and shared service as being important to building and maintaining his relationship with Julia and his sons.

**Caleb.** Caleb (53) was married for 23 years prior to his wife's passing in August, 2011. It was this event that led him to seek out support through The Abba Project. He joined the group within a month of his wife's death and was involved in it during 2011 and 2012. Caleb has two children, a son who is 25 and a daughter, Allison, who is 23. He is a CPA and is currently on

staff at a large church. The circumstances and timing of Caleb's entrance into The Abba Project gave him a unique perspective on the experience.

His wife's passing was somewhat sudden and unexpected, leaving him to cope with his own loss while at the same time maintaining his role as provider and parent to his then 18-year-old daughter. To help manage this transition, Caleb took an extended leave from his work that allowed him to be home with Allison. This arrangement was a new one for Caleb since he had closely aligned himself with his role as a provider for the family and experienced some understandable challenges as he adjusted to his new role as a full-time single parent. He explained the challenges that he encountered in this transition:

They'll all admit that I'm an extremely good provider. And I thought that's what all fathering had to be done. You know, they had shoes; we went on some nice vacations. And I spent time with them, obviously. I was home for dinner. But you know, they'll look back and say: "All you did is work." Well, I mean, I didn't miss any of their games . . . I was there to kind of tuck them in. But they kind of . . . they mainly saw mom at home and dad providing. And so it was just kind of a weird thing.

Though this arrangement was new, Caleb described his time of being home with his daughter as important to building the relationship. He persisted with engaging his daughter through activities and discussions that were assigned in The Abba Project and really saw the fruit of this once his daughter went away to college. In his interview, Caleb reflected on the total experience:

I think when we did the first couple of date-type things, obviously it was structured, it was uncomfortable. It's kind of like going out on a first date with someone you don't know. And now I've been given a list of questions that I should ask. And I'm not even

sure if I'm asking them right. But I think eventually it got to where she knew I cared.

Like I said, I think it was the letter she sent me kind of after the fact that said, "I tried to push you away and you always stayed. You didn't give up on me." That kind of thing.

And so that was neat to see. But I think during the process, I did feel sometimes like it was just an exercise, or a box I was checking off that I did it. But I didn't really know if I had done it right or if it was having an impact.

This letter that Caleb mentions came while Allison was away at college, and it was clearly very meaningful for him to hear his daughter's perspective on his intentional investment in her life.

**Dean.** Dean (60) worked as an engineer prior to his retirement and recently returned to work on a part-time basis. He is currently divorced but has been married three times, and he has children from two prior marriages. He has a son who is 26 years old, and three daughters, ages 31, 18, and 16. Dean participated in The Abba Project between 2014 and 2015. Although his youngest daughter, Sarah, was the primary reason for his involvement in The Abba Project, Dean sought to complete group assignments and to implement his learning with each of his three daughters. The special circumstances that led Dean to participate in the group serve to illustrate the primary role that his youngest daughter had in prompting him toward significant life change. Prior to participation in The Abba Project, Dean described himself and his fathering as follows:

I was always into being large and in charge in my career. I enjoyed my beer drinking.

And kids were kind of . . . I left the raising of the kids; really that was Mom's job. That was my attitude, and so wrong was that.

Sarah, 13 years old at the time, was participating in therapy and invited Dean to attend a session. During the session, she proceeded to tell him that she didn't want to keep having visits

with him if he was drinking. Dean related that this incident was a major turning point in his life.

The experience led to deep soul-searching:

I gave up my drinking career and realized that I was not being the father that God intended me to be. I was not a good role model, the kind of man I would like my daughter to choose to marry someday. I was not their hero. And I changed, because I wanted to, because I love my girls and my family. And, boy, things have just gotten great ever since.

Shortly after the incident with Sarah and her counselor, Dean joined The Abba Project. He sought to implement what he was learning through consistent engagement with each of his three daughters. Though his teenage daughters are now busy with their own activities and social lives, Dean related that he enjoys a great relationship with them. His relationships with his 26-year-old daughter and even with his two former wives have all dramatically improved.

**Kevin.** Kevin (57) has been married for 31 years. He was the only father who participated in this study who did not have a son. Instead, he is a father to three daughters, ages 26, 23, and 21. Kevin holds a bachelor's degree and is the president and owner of a construction company. He became involved in The Abba Project more than four years ago after experiencing difficulties in his relationship with his youngest daughter, Claire.

Having multiple daughters provided Kevin with an enriched view of the father-daughter relationship. He mentioned challenges with female peers as major challenges during adolescence. For his own relationships with his daughters, their decisions about romantic relationships presented an even bigger source of conflict. This was true for his oldest daughter, and it became an issue again with his youngest daughter. Fathers' feelings and attitudes about their daughters' romantic involvement was a major theme in this study and is a topic that will be



explored at length in the section that follows. Kevin spoke insightfully concerning how this relational dynamic played out in his own fathering:

I think that's where a lot of girls derail, is the parents, and especially the dad, will get so frustrated they give up on them and almost close the door. And then the girl is left with no other alternative than to follow through with her craziness, and maybe not have another place to go except that boy or whatever.

Through participation in The Abba Project, Kevin found new ways to communicate with and influence each of his three daughters. He could participate in his oldest daughter's wedding a few years ago and will be giving his second daughter away at her wedding in July of this year.

**Ben.** Ben (58) participated in The Abba Project 5 years ago. He is a retired firefighter of 34 years. He has been married for 27 years and holds an associate's degree. Ben is the father of four children, with the youngest, Melissa (23), being his only daughter. Ben's sons are 36, 30, and 28. Because he was a father for 13 years before having a daughter, Ben could speak with wonder and freshness about the differences he encountered in what, for him, was a very new fathering experience. Ben related an incident from early in Melissa's life that showed him just how different fathering a daughter would be:

I thought I knew something after raising three boys. And I thought, "I've got this parenting thing down pat." My boys, they wouldn't really . . . they didn't really talk until they were like five or eight, and mostly they'd just make machine gun noises and dump truck noises. And then when Melissa came along, I'll never forget, she was 2 years old and she said, "Dad, that hurts my feelings." It blew me away. Well, I mean, she was, like, speaking in sentences, which was weird. And she said, like, *feelings*. I mean, I

remember the whole family being around, and the boys just looked at her like, “Huh?”

And I just had this feeling like, “My gosh, this is going to be a different one.”

Ben spoke of finding great joy in his relationship with Melissa during her childhood, stating, “She was just so different, which was nice.” By the time Melissa hit adolescence, however, these differences became a source of both frustration and pain. This, again, was very different from the experience he had with fathering his three sons:

I always felt off balance with her. She would just ask me questions about the emotional side of life, you know. And I would . . . she always just sort of threw me for a loop. And the boys would make me mad. I mean there were a lot of times when I was mad at my boys or whatever. They’d get in trouble. But they never made me cry. Melissa made me cry . . . lots of times.

Ben learned about The Abba Project through his wife who worked with someone who was familiar with Dr. Watson and her work. He lived at some distance from the location of the group and participation in The Abba Project required a 3-hour round trip commute. During his participation in the group, Ben was very deliberate about pursuing a better relationship with Melissa. Steadily the relationship saw improvement, and he indicated that Melissa now calls him each day just to touch base.

This section provided information about this study’s research participants so that readers can evaluate the generalizability of research findings (McLeod, 2011). The next section presents themes that emerged from interaction with the data obtained through in-depth engagement with the participants. Chapter Three discussed methods of assuring the trustworthiness of these findings (Creswell, 2017).

### **Findings**

The purpose of this research was to illuminate the experiences of help-seeking fathers of adolescent daughters. In order to collect this information, six research questions were developed to facilitate a better understanding of the experiences that the co-researchers had with fathering an adolescent daughter and participating in an intervention that was designed to promote this relationship. Research participants engaged these questions through participation in semistructured interviews, personal journals, ongoing communication with the researcher, and multiple rounds of member checking during the data processing and interpretation stages. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter?
  - a. How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?
2. How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking?
3. How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention?
4. How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group?
5. How would they say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?
6. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters?

The research questions were intentionally structured to provide a narrative arc—tracing fathers’ progression from initial encounters with their daughters, into adolescence, through participation in a fathering intervention, and into their final reflections on the collective experience. This arc guided the process of inquiry and was supported by the narratives that the participants shared. A loose sketch of this progression may be helpful for understanding the larger story that was presented in the participants’ data.

The first research question enabled fathers to share about their general experience with fathering a daughter. They were able to reflect on how this relationship changed as their daughters entered adolescence and experienced a range of personal and developmental challenges. The experience of relational challenges prompted fathers to seek out help, and the second research question explored the ways that they encountered and overcame barriers to participation in a fathering intervention. The third research question explored the experience of participating in a fathering intervention. Fathers shared the impressions and experiences they had with the intervention and the numerous ways the intervention helped them grow in their fathering. The fourth research question enabled fathers to reflect on the changes that resulted from their participation in a structured fathering intervention. Expanding out from that, the fifth research question prompted fathers to consider how their experiences with their daughters and with The Abba Project had changed them as people. Finally, the sixth research question provided fathers with an opportunity to consolidate their learning by offering advice or recommendations to other fathers of adolescent daughters.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on presenting the primary themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants’ interaction with the six research questions. According to Creswell (2017), “Themes (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of

several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 307). Supplementing this definition, van Manen (1997) explains that qualitative themes should make sense of participants’ experiences, capture the essence of their experience, and convey a necessary context for their experiences. To qualify as a theme, at least nine of the 11 participants’ narratives provided support for the underlying construct that was identified (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Subthemes were developed around notable constructs within major themes and were supported by a minimum of six participant narratives. Many of the subthemes received robust support in the data but were classified as subthemes because they emphasized an aspect, or a part, of the larger theme under which they were categorized. Table 4.3 presents the 15 primary themes and 17 subthemes that were identified. They are grouped according to the research question with which they corresponded.

Table 4.3

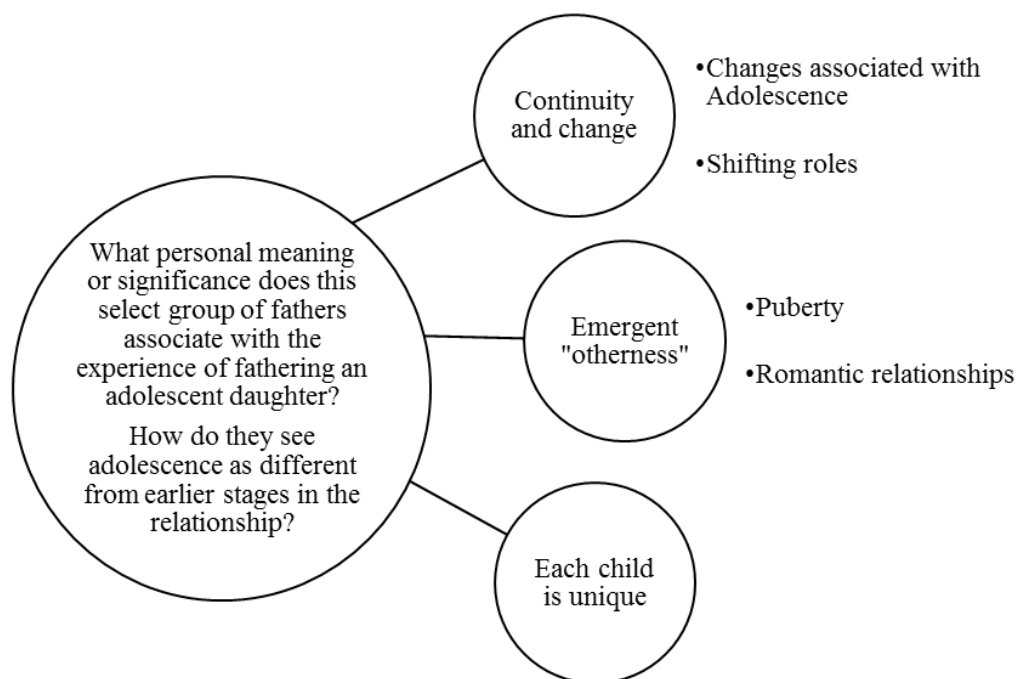
*Summary of Findings*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Primary Theme</b>	<b>Related Subtheme(s)</b>
1. What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter? a. How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?	Continuity and change	Changes associated with adolescence Shifting roles
	Emergent “otherness”	Puberty Romantic relationships
	Each child is unique	N/A
2. How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking?	Identified barriers	Time and commitment Discomfort or uncertainty about the group
		Desperation Prior connection
	Overcoming barriers	
3. How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention?	Experiences within the group	Vicarious learning “Brotherhood”
	Experiences outside of the group	N/A
4. How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group?	Change was complex and multidetermined	N/A
	The act of “moving toward”	N/A
	Insight and awareness	Increased awareness of own role and importance Female adolescent world
5. How would they say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?	Change as people	Relational approach Deepening of the self
	Shifting of priorities	N/A
6. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters?	Intentionality	Engagement Don’t give up
	Start building the relationship early	N/A

For clarity, primary themes and subthemes are organized around the corresponding research question. To provide both context and texture to this presentation, themes and subthemes are presented with rich narrative descriptions and include extensive references to participant data (Creswell, 2017; Stake, 2010). Summary tables and graphic depictions of the relationship between research questions, themes, and subthemes supplement this presentation. Figures are presented at the outset of each research question section as a way to introduce the content, and tables are provided at the conclusion of the section to summarize the findings. Because the areas explored by the research questions are often closely related, some themes and subthemes touch upon subjects that span multiple research questions. Where this occurs, the themes and subthemes are linked with the research question with which they closely identified.

#### **Research Question One: Findings (Themes) Related to the Experience of Fathering an Adolescent Daughter**

The first research question was presented in two parts as follows: What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter? How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship? Figure 4.1 presents the three primary themes and four subthemes that emerged from the data on this research question. Each of these primary themes and subthemes will be explored in the section that follows.

**Figure 4.1.** Research Question One Primary Themes and Subthemes

*Figure 4.1.* Research Question One: What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter? How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?

**Primary theme one: Continuity and change.** The first primary theme that emerged from the data was continuity and change. Continuity refers to an enduring connection between fathers and daughters that is persistent, enduring, and minimally impacted by daughters' developmental progression. Change refers to a more disruptive unsettling of existing relational dynamics ushered in by daughters' movement into adolescence. Research participants described their relationships with their adolescent daughters as being characterized by both continuity and change. The two identified subthemes (*changes associated with adolescence* and *shifting roles*) explored important aspects of this larger topic and the ways in which fathers experienced the disruptions that were brought on by their daughters' entrance into adolescence. While some



fathers emphasized one aspect over another, elements of both continuity and change were a part of each individual narrative ( $N = 11$ ). Dean offered insight into the relationship between continuity and change by reflecting on how his three daughters' enduring needs could be met in new ways throughout their development:

The interaction, communication, intimacy are all there, but what and how we do things changes as the individuals inside the relationship enter different phases. The need for affirmation, honesty, intimacy, and security [is] present from baby to toddler to preadolescence to adolescence to young womanhood. The father's job is to be able to communicate and fulfill the need in each of these phases of the daughter's life. This way the daughter can know what the filled need feels like so she can identify it when she senses it in adulthood and can make a good choice in a man.

One marker of the continuity of the fathering experience can be seen in the participants' recognition of the persistence of their daughters' character traits and interests. Brad described his daughter's "strong will" as a defining characteristic that has continued from her infancy through her adolescence, though he also indicated that this trait expressed itself in new and more challenging ways as his daughter has grown up. In terms of interests, Chris explained that his daughter Cate was creative from her earliest years: "I probably didn't pick up signals at 3 years old that I should have, outside of going, 'If it had been me, I'd be drawing stick figures.'" His daughter has maintained her creative interests and is now planning to attend art school.

Overall, fathers described relationships with their daughters that were enduring despite occasionally significant turmoil. The relationship between change and continuity is considered in the next section.

*Subtheme one: Changes associated with adolescence.* Many of the changes that fathers identified with adolescence had to do with their daughter becoming a woman. These changes included entering puberty and becoming involved in romantic relationships. Because these areas were identified as subthemes, they will be explored separately under the primary theme of Emergent “otherness.” Nine fathers identified adolescence as a time of dramatic change. In many cases, the move into adolescence brought about increased conflict and relational strain. Adolescence was also a time when daughters became more independent and increasingly involved with peer relationships and activities of their own. As a group, fathers felt unprepared for these changes. Caleb commented that things became “harder” and noted that there was “no manual” on how to father well during the adolescent stage. Shawn was reluctant to accept the changes that adolescence brought, stating, “It was a tough transition. Because I think, for me, very naively, I didn’t want things to change too much. But everything changes.”

Fathers consistently identified an increase in conflict. This increase was most striking in relationships where fathers had previously enjoyed harmonious relations with their daughters during childhood. Brad, whose first two children were girls, stated, “I loved having daughters and teaching them and watching them grow and learn. It was delightful.” While he had an easier time with his first daughter in adolescence, his relationship to his second daughter, Alyssa, became increasingly strained. Brad explained his frustration in dealing with Alyssa’s alternating bouts of great intelligence and childish tantrums:

She’s a really sharp kid and I admire her intellectual ability so much. And then sometimes I’m faced with this contradictory: “I’m going to behave like a 5-year-old or 2- or 3-year-old.” It’s like, “Stop that; just grow up for me. I mean, you have so much

potential.” And I want to imbue her with everything I can to help her be successful, and yet we’ve got this battle going on.

Ben offered similar sentiments in describing how his relationship was impacted by his daughter’s entrance into adolescence:

It’s like I went from having this great daughter, and all of a sudden, I was just in combat with her the whole time. I mean . . . we couldn’t leave. We couldn’t go anywhere . . .

The last four or five years, mostly; the last three were the worst. But it was like combat mode. I’ve got a picture of me when she was 14, and I got a picture of me when she was 19, and it looked like I’d been through the Battle of Leningrad [laughing].

Prior to adolescence, Ben enjoyed a range of outdoor activities with his daughter. He explained that even this shared point of connection was lost temporarily when she entered adolescence:

It was great until . . . I’d take her fishing and we’d do all kinds of stuff together: hiking and camping. And just all of a sudden she hit, like, thirteen, maybe twelve, and all of a sudden, it’s like she just started . . . everything was a conflict. Everything.

Not all of the changes brought about by a daughter’s adolescence were negative. Numerous fathers, particularly those with older daughters, mentioned the possibility of relating to their daughters in more satisfying ways as they matured. David explained that his relationship with his now adult daughter Rachel has become more “mutual.” Ben has enjoyed the increasingly deep and thoughtful talks that he has been able to engage in with his daughter, Melissa.

In contrast with the prevailing emphasis on change, a significant subgroup of fathers ( $n = 5$ ) described the relationship with their adolescent daughter(s) as being characterized by essential

stability. Although the numbers did not support the inclusion of this aspect as a subtheme, it was significant enough to warrant mention as an area of interest. Factors associated with relational stability during adolescence include the maintenance of family traditions and the continuation of shared activities. Family traditions took many forms but frequently involved set meal times, religious practices, and regular family outings (such as vacations or other recreational pursuits). Kevin spoke to the importance of maintaining traditions in his home, even as he acknowledged that it was sometimes a struggle to keep them going:

I guess we've always been somewhat of a regimented family. Not a drill-sergeant mentality, but we've always held the kids accountable: dinner at the table, prayers on a regular basis, they attend church. What I learned is to make and continue making an attempt to make connection. And they will come and go with their pushback, but you can't take it personally. You have to continue to fight the fight.

Focusing on the importance of family vacations, Caleb described them as an important time for connection where he could put aside his work and just focus on family.

Numerous fathers mentioned shared activities as a source of relational stability, and these tended to revolve around sports and other extracurricular pursuits. Some of these fathers served as coaches for their daughters' athletic teams, and they found that an area of common interest functioned as a buffer for some of the other changes taking place in the relationship. David, Chris, Caleb, Gary, and Shawn all mentioned sports as being important to their bond with their daughters. Gary mentioned that coaching his daughter Julia's competitive softball team was a way for him to sustain their relationship after his divorce:

I would not probably have been coaching an 18-youth softball team if it weren't for this class [The Abba Project]. I've always been a baseball coach, lacrosse, basketball,

soccer—but the relationship that I gained out of learning more about young girls and young women has really helped me with this team.

David coached his daughter Rachel's basketball team during her childhood. As Rachel got older, she became more involved in volleyball and dance. Though he didn't coach these sports, David consistently showed up to support her performances. Caleb's early experience of coaching and later supporting as a spectator was similar. He mentioned the regular practice of getting dinner together after an event as an important and enjoyable routine.

Finally, a few of the fathers—particularly those who had younger daughters and joined The Abba Project for enhancement rather than dramatic repair—described adolescence as being relatively stable and nondisruptive. James was an example of this, as can be seen in his statement on his daughter's adolescence: "I don't see the significance [of adolescence] as different from any other stage but do feel that you have to be more intentional about it."

While not universally experienced as disruptive, the changes brought about by daughters' adolescent development tended to require significant adjustment on the part of fathers. At the same time, they acknowledged that these changes opened up the possibility of deeper and more meaningful engagement. As daughters develop and become increasingly independent of their parents, established roles in the family may become unsettled. When this happens, both daughters and their parents must adjust. Fathers' adjustment to their shifting role will be the focus of the next subtheme.

***Subtheme two: Shifting roles.*** This subtheme was supported by data from nine of the participants. Many fathers struggled to balance their desire to protect their daughters with the need to allow their daughters greater freedom and independence—even the freedom to fail in areas where daughters resisted parental direction. Daughters' desire for independence frequently

led to an increase in power struggles and conflict with parents. Through it all, fathers saw their role shifting from that of a protective controller to that of a coach or advisor. Fathers sought to promote their daughters' growth in areas of decision making and judgment while at the same time developing their character and instilling lasting values. This process was often a challenge for fathers, and they frequently expressed a sense of powerlessness and lack of control. The following narratives, drawn from participant data, will provide insight into the experiences of fathers as they worked to renegotiate their paternal role during their daughters' adolescence.

Brad described feeling distressed by the fact that he could no longer enforce his authority in the way that he did in his daughter Alyssa's childhood. He shared an incident from a recent family trip as an example of the ways that his ability to gain compliance had shifted:

When they were younger, there definitely [was] a much more compliant phase. They're more obedient, and I don't have to do as many negotiations to get where we want to go, and certainly didn't deal with any of the complete opposite: "No, I won't do that." And I could pick them up and put them in the car seat whether they want to be in the car seat or not. And "Yes, we are going, and you have no choice." And those kinds of situations were more manageable. Versus now, like even this weekend, we went together as family up to the mountains to a cabin and [Alyssa] was giving us grief because she's busy amid filling out her college application forms for the deadlines yesterday.

Brad went on to explain that this situation turned into a full-blown conflict in which he contemplated driving his daughter back home from the vacation. Things eventually worked out, but the experience of lost control and a greater need for negotiation was apparent.

When daughters refused advice and direction, fathers needed to learn how to provide them with space for independent learning—even when that learning came through difficult experience. David described how this played out with his own children:

It became obviously much more challenging as our kids, and specifically the girls grew up. They'd get into situations, whether it's middle school and cliques, and guys, and not the right guys . . . them not listening to you. And this is fairly standard, probably whether it's a girl or a boy, but they know better than their parents ever knew [laughing]. And then they find out that . . . you know, the most awesome thing that a parent can hear is there is that point in time, sometime after twenty, your daughter or son comes back to you and says, "You know what? You were right."

Dean was adamant about allowing his children the opportunity to learn from their experiences:

[You need to] understand that we're all inquisitive and we all push the limit. And we all learn from our mistakes. I mean, I used to feel bad when my kids would fall and stub their toe or bump their nose. And it's like, that's how they learn. You can't coddle them. You've got to let them bump their nose and suffer the consequences. I mean, you've got to make sure they're safe, but . . . start growing up.

Finally, Shawn described the place that difficult experiences had in teaching his kids important life lessons and building their character: "I'm a big fan, quite honestly, of letting them learn it the hard way, especially when they don't want to take your advice when you know what you are talking about." Shawn continued:

I'm okay to let them stumble a little bit. I think that's the real world. If you keep them in a bubble, you're not doing them any favors. . . . Ultimately, I said, "I want you to have

the ability to rely on yourself. And I don't want you to have to rely on a husband or someone else . . . I want you to really go in confident, knowing that you can handle situations that life is going to throw at you."

In allowing their children "freedom to fail," fathers needed to actively adjust the ways that they thought about and expressed their fathering role. Kevin related a recent conversation with his college-age daughter Claire that demonstrated this shift:

I think she tries to be so independent, but that is where I had to have the talk with her. I said, "I'm not here to lecture you or pilot you. I mean, I'm just here to . . . I used to coach you and now I'm just a counselor." You know, switch to that counselor hat. And I'm just here as a sounding board.

This shifting of roles during daughters' adolescence was seen as a necessary developmental process by fathers and was something that they experienced with their sons as well. In a sense, the daughter's process of individuation, though difficult, was recognized as a necessity of human development, and not exclusively a feature of female adolescent development. The more specific changes brought about by daughters' development into women is the focus of the second subtheme: emergent "otherness."

**Primary theme two: Emergent "otherness."** Ten of the fathers identified adolescence—and specifically puberty—as a time when a sense of "otherness" was introduced into the relationship with their daughter. In many ways, daughters' development into young women left dads feeling uncertain and even disoriented. This was especially the case for fathers like Chris, who "didn't grow up around girls" due to not having any sisters in the home. The introduction of a feminine "otherness" into the relationship led many fathers to rely in new ways on the expertise and direct involvement of the "other" parent—namely, their wives. Ben



explained that he “depended on [his] wife a lot for just things that would come up.” Craig described his wife’s ability to provide balance and perspective during times when he struggled to understand his daughter, Karen:

There are definitely times where you go like, WTF, what do I do here? And I can look to [my wife]. And I’m blessed, to be honest. I’m blessed because I’ve got what God really talks about is this helpmate. And I have this. This woman who’s in it with me . . . with incredible wisdom and a great sense of humor. And when I lose it, she isn’t kicking me out. It’s like, “I’ll wait for you. Go get that out of your system. I’m gonna wait for you,” and then, “You know your confusion is making you irrational right now so . . . And we know that, and let me give you some insight here.” Because I’ll just be scratching my head on [some issue with their daughter]: “I don’t understand why that’s a big deal.”

In a follow-up to this statement, I asked Craig whether his wife helped to “decode” their daughter, and he answered in the affirmative but noted that the decoding is mutual: “I think she does decode some, and a reason why I say this is because we have a 9-year-old son, and I think I decode for my wife.”

Getting a crash course on the feminine through his daughter’s adolescence had a different kind of impact on Ben’s relationship with his wife—it helped him to understand her better:

One thing that I realized with my daughter going through all this and the stuff I learned: I actually started learning about my wife better. I thought my wife was doing all these things because she was evil [laughing]. Now I realize that she is just a woman and just . . . they’re different.

Prior to adolescence, fathers often saw their sons and daughters merely as children. Adolescence brought gender differences and associated challenges to the forefront of the relationship. Caleb's narrative serves to demonstrate this sentiment:

When they're in elementary and all those kinds of things, I won't say there's a big difference. There doesn't seem to be a huge difference between a boy and a girl, really. I mean, you get involved with what they're doing, and then at a certain age it starts getting very distinct that one's a boy and one's a girl kind of thing.

James made a similar point in describing his experience with fathering a son and a daughter: "I think, obviously, the older she got, the more . . . when she was little, like prepubescent, it was almost like gender neutral, or like it didn't really matter." James pointed to puberty as the event that ushered in a greater awareness of his daughter's distinctiveness as a female.

The awareness of something new emerging during adolescence was widespread among fathers, and puberty was consistently recognized as a starting point for this change. The entrance into womanhood—signaled by the onset of puberty—brought with it an increased interest on the part of daughters in forming romantic attachments. Because daughters' puberty and romantic relationships were significant features of fathers' experiences with an emergent "otherness," they have both been identified as subthemes for further explication.

***Subtheme one: Puberty.*** Nine fathers considered their daughter's entrance into puberty to be a major event in the relationship. These fathers mentioned bodily and hormonal changes associated with puberty as both mysterious and intimidating. Issues associated with bodily changes, such as body image and self-esteem appeared frequently in the participant data and will be considered separately under the subtheme *female adolescent world*, presented in the findings

for research question four. Although it was not a universal experience, some fathers, like Dean, became less comfortable with close contact and affectionate displays once his daughters entered puberty. Participation in The Abba Project helped to show Dean the importance of maintaining this: “It’s okay to hug them when they’re going through puberty, because they need that touch. And it’s like: “Well, my gosh, they have boobs now, and I can’t touch them, because . . . ” you know? Yeah, but that’s okay!”

In addition to uncertainty on how to think about their daughters’ changing bodies, some fathers mentioned menstruation, hormonal changes, and “PMS” as sources of discomfort. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS), or fathers’ perception of it, was quite disruptive in some relationships. Asked about how his relationship to his daughter has changed with her adolescence, James stated:

It just closes down a little bit more. It’s kind of the moody teen thing, and PMS is real. You know, like it is ridiculous. You can tell when it’s happening because the force changes, and she just gets that much more moody.

In contrast to Dean’s experience, Brad did not feel that hormonal changes had any noticeable impact on his relationship to his two daughters: “My wife is very even-tempered at all times, as are my kids [daughters]. I think there’s probably a little more drama that comes of that (PMS), but it’s not that dramatic, nothing that would catch my attention.”

In puberty, as was the case for girls’ adolescence generally, wives served as a primary resource of information for fathers. Wives also tended to become the main source of support to daughters—often taking the leading role in addressing issues related to menstruation and sexuality. Although he did not view puberty as something that “stuck out” as “uncomfortable,” David explained that his wife took the lead in addressing these changes with their daughter

Rachel: “A lot of times, I think our wives do a great job of handling [the topic of puberty]. So we can do whatever we do. And it’s not a big thing.”

Other dads, like Gary, were open to discussing changes related to puberty, but were rebuffed by their daughters: “I think on the adolescent part, Julia [his daughter] has really shifted, especially for the female-oriented components of growing up. She’s really much closer with her mother on that.” Gary reflected further, relating a time when he attempted to bring up the topic of puberty with Julia: “You definitely see . . . I can feel that line of demarcation: That if it’s female oriented, it’s with mom. We’ve had that discussion, [and Julia responded] ‘Dad, I don’t want to talk to you about it.’”

Although they did not always feel that they could directly address issues related to puberty, fathers did recognize the close link between their daughters’ physical development and their daughters’ movement into complex new romantic relationships.

***Subtheme two: Romantic relationships.*** Nine fathers identified romantic relationships as a major theme in their daughters’ adolescent development. Discussions of this topic tended to focus on two areas: fathers’ role in controlling, or shaping their daughter’s dating environment ( $n = 5$ ), and fathers’ role in providing an example for a male partner ( $n = 7$ ). While it was not always explicitly mentioned, there was an undercurrent in the fathers’ narratives that recognized romantic involvement as something dynamically new to the father-daughter relationship. In a sense, daughters’ early experiences with dating put fathers on notice that they were on their way toward potentially partnering up with another male who might eventually replace the father as the primary man in the daughter’s life. Fathers did not generally see their daughters’ boyfriends as rivals, but they did tend to become more protective once daughters started dating. This could

be seen in their active involvement in setting rules for dating and even meeting directly with the boys whom their daughters would be dating.

Shawn's daughter, Sophia, was resistant to her father's involvement in her dating, but he persisted:

[I had a practice of] talking to the boy before they go out and letting him know my expectations. And I want my daughter to know that I'm going to do it, even though she might think it is silly or might be a little embarrassing. I'm just like, "You don't really have the option on this."

Gary has also found it important to establish expectations and to convey his protective interest in his daughter, Julia, to her boyfriend: "I do talk with her boyfriend too, just to make sure we have a good common understanding: what's accepted, what's not. We don't get down to the details, but a lot of it is about respect."

Beyond direct conversations with their daughters' romantic partners, fathers mentioned being intentional about setting an example of male behavior and teaching their daughters how they should be treated. Shawn was very deliberate in this area and specifically mentioned "opening a car door" for his daughter, and "not pulling up to the driveway and honking." By doing this, Shawn hoped to teach his daughter to "expect that [respectful treatment] more often than not." James was also intentional about bringing this type of modeling into how he approached dates with his daughter, Anna:

I think [it's important] even just showing them how a date works. You know, like opening a door, or asking where she wants to go. Giving her choices: "What do you want to talk about?" Knowing that it's not just whatever the guy wants to do. I think that's good.

Even outside of the dating realm, fathers were aware of the example they set for their daughters by behavior and the ways in which they related to the daughter's mother, their wife.

Kevin spoke to his own awareness in this area:

And don't forget about how you're treating your wife. I mean, they're [children] taking notes all along the way. So dads that are kind of checking out on their wives, that is as big a component of this whole thing as anything. . . . When they say they're not listening to you, they are observing you. And all you can do is have a healthy relationship with your wife. Continuing to be putting the cell phones away. Whatever that might be: giving them 100 percent of your attention, helping them with the dishes, asking them how they're doing before you tell them how your day went. I mean it's a whole lot—holding hands, you name it.

Dean took a serious and expansive view of his role in modeling manhood for his daughters:

I guess the thing about daughters that I didn't realize before The Abba Project is that a girl is going to learn about a man by . . . through their eyes looking at their father. Their father is their role model, their hero. And if you're not a good role model and not a hero, and you kind of just push them to the wayside, then that's how they're going to think of men. And they're going to pick a man someday that is like their father. And if you're kind of a workaholic or an alcoholic, or you're all about making money and looking big and you don't have much of a heart, then that's the kind of person they think that a guy is supposed to be like. And that's kind of sad and scary.

So, yeah, I'm their hero. And I'm the role model of the kind of man they're going to pick someday to marry. And that is a scary thought. And when you think of it that

way, it's like: "Okay, I've got a big job. And I want to do this right, because they're going to be my kids until I die, or they die." . . . I can choose how that's going to be. Is that going to be fun and pleasant and beautiful, and "life is great"? Or is that going to be "life is torture"? So I choose the high road.

This lengthy narrative from Dean serves to illustrate the important role that fathers believe they play in preparing their daughters for romantic involvement and life more generally. The final major theme for this research question had to do with fathers' reflections on the uniqueness of each child. The reality of this uniqueness brought a needed perspective to understanding the nuance and individuality of each dyadic parental relationship.

**Primary theme three: Each child is unique.** Because each of the participants in this study has at least two children, they had an intimate basis for comparing the experience of fathering one child versus another. The four fathers who had more than one daughter had an even more proximate opportunity to recognize daughters' uniqueness. All 11 of the fathers identified differences between children as a major theme in their parenting. One significant factor was differences in children's gender, but that was not the only noteworthy aspect. Fathers found that individual differences in temperament and interests made some children easier to relate to, and get along with, than others.

Brad equated encountering differences in his second daughter, Alyssa, to being "hit by a bus." He expanded on that thought during the interview:

[My daughters are] entirely different personalities, and it's changed my whole world about how to relate to them. And I'm still struggling, I don't know why, to keep them as separate. I don't know that I struggle as much now, but it was a long struggle to keep...

You know, I want to be fair, and to treat them the same way, but they don't react the same way.

Recognizing these differences, Brad needed to make major adjustments in his parenting approach to Alyssa. The template that he had developed for fathering his first daughter simply would not work for his second. Confronted by a similar reality, Craig emphasized the need to intentionally learn about the needs and traits of each child. As he described it: "You need to go to school on your daughter."

David and Kevin, two fathers who each have three daughters, were quick to speak about the remarkable differences of each of their girls. Daughters who were more similar in temperament to their fathers often allowed for a more natural and intuitive connection, whereas daughters with vastly different personalities tended to be more challenging and in turn required a more intentional approach. This dynamic caused both David and Kevin to work harder in relating to the daughter who differed most from them. David explained that his daughter, Rachel, "was the hardest, for whatever reason." Recognizing this, he was deliberate about getting to know Rachel's unique needs and personality traits. Along with being more deliberate in his observations of his daughter, David did this by studying Rachel's "love language" and having her complete a structured personality inventory. Similarly, Kevin recognized a need to know and pursue his youngest daughter, Claire, in ways that he didn't find necessary with his two older girls: "I've invested. I've definitely put much more energy into my relationship with my younger daughter, believing that that was the right thing to do."

This section of the findings presented the results related to Research Question One: What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter? How do they see adolescence as different from earlier



stages in the relationship? Research participants reported encountering their children with a sense of both wonder and mystery, recognizing each child as an emergent being who required deliberate study and pursuit. Because of their difference in gender, daughters often required an extra level of study and deliberation on the part of these fathers. Gender-related differences became even more pronounced as daughters became adolescents, entered puberty, and became involved in romantic relationships. Although they continued to pursue a relationship with their daughter(s), many fathers characterized adolescence as a time of conflict and change. Table 4.4 provides a summary of themes and subthemes that were identified for the first research question.

When their best efforts to relate to their daughters were met with frustration, or when their daughters began to struggle in various ways, these fathers became open to seeking out additional resources and support. The fathers' experiences with help seeking and overcoming barriers to support were the focus of the second research question.

Table 4.4

*Experiences with Fathering an Adolescent Daughter and Changes to the Relationship Associated with Daughter's Adolescence*

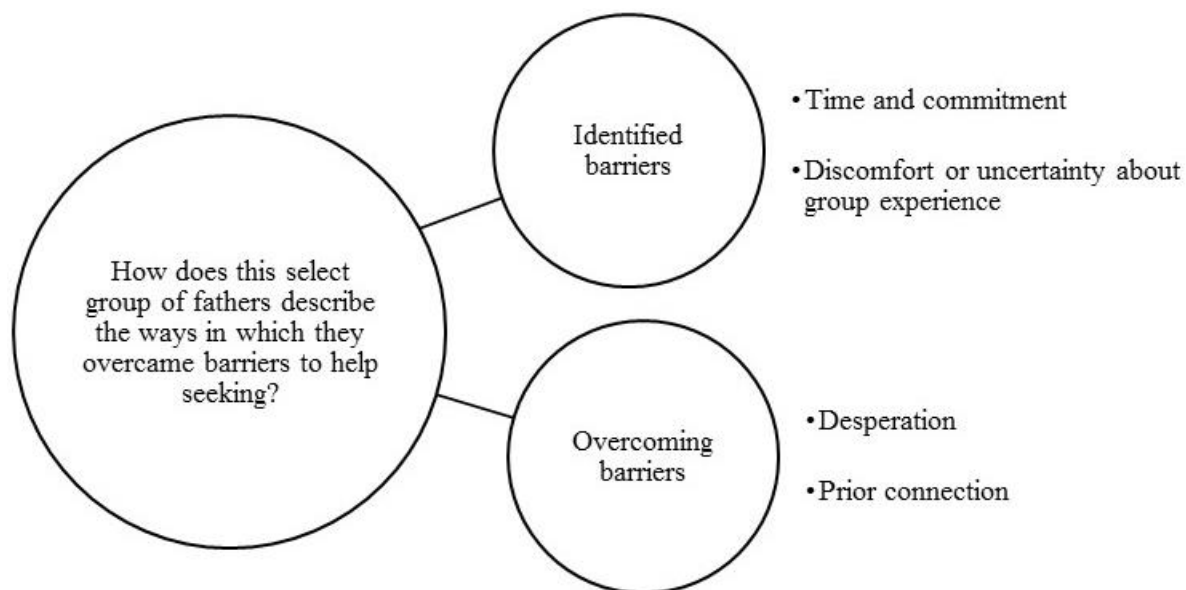
<b>Theme</b>	<b># Participants Supporting Theme</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Continuity and change	11	Perspectives on adolescence as a time of essential stability and dramatic change
Changes associated with adolescence	9	Adolescence seen as a dramatically different phase of the relationship with new challenges Some fathers saw the relationship as relatively stable across stages
Shifting roles	9	Negotiation of daughter's growing independence while providing support and protection
Emergent "otherness"	10	Differences in gender of father and daughter(s) are accentuated as girls enter puberty and transition to womanhood
Puberty	9	Navigating bodily and hormonal changes associated with puberty
Romantic relationships	9	Fathers are role models for romantic partner and influence daughters' dating environment
Each child is unique	11	Each father-daughter relationship is distinct and comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities

### **Research Question Two: Findings (Themes) Related to Overcoming Barriers to Help Seeking**

Because the research literature speaks to the prevalence of barriers that may inhibit men's participation in family services (Berlyn et al., 2009; Frank et al., 2014; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010), I was eager to learn from a group of fathers who elected to participate in an intervention about how barriers were experienced and overcome. Toward that end, the second research question asked: How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they

overcame barriers to help seeking? The next section includes primary themes and subthemes related to the barriers participants encountered and the ways they overcame them. Figure 4.2 provides a visual depiction of the relationship between the two primary themes and four subthemes.

**Figure 4.2.** Research Question Two Primary Themes and Subthemes



*Figure 4.2.* Research Question Two: How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking?

**Primary theme one: Identified barriers.** Because they were “participators” rather than “avoiders” of a fathering intervention, it was not surprising to find that barriers to treatment did not impede this group of fathers. Nevertheless, participants did describe a number of areas of uncertainty and hesitation as they contemplated involvement with The Abba Project. Barriers to participation tended to cluster around subthemes of time commitment and uncertainty about participating in a group experience with other men. Because these subthemes were identified so consistently, they will be the focus of presentation for this theme.

*Subtheme one: Time and commitment.* Eight of the fathers mentioned limited time as a significant barrier toward participation in The Abba Project, with family life and work obligations serving as the primary hurdles. This reality was experienced and replicated during the research process as fathers often struggled to carve out time for participation in this study.

Craig's discussion of the cost of the group, along with the time commitment involved, helps to demonstrate the extent to which men approached participation in the group as a decision about where to invest scarce resources. For Craig and for other fathers, this was very much a question of stewardship. Because he was invited into the group directly by Dr. Watson in order to provide feedback on the curriculum, Craig was not asked to pay the usual fee of \$500. Nevertheless, his reflections on costs and other barriers to participation in the group were instructive:

I would say that the barriers are the normal things of . . . the costs, you know, 500 bucks or whatever it was. Now in my case, she [Dr. Watson] just invited me to come be a part of it, so remove that barrier. That would have been a barrier, just not knowing if it was worth that, for a family that doesn't just have that. So, time: You're committing to 9 months and you're going to commit to be there because it's only one time [a month]. And then you're going to commit to doing it. So that's a barrier. And then there is just the vulnerability.

Despite experiencing difficulties in his relationship with his daughter, Cate, time constraints associated with another hard commitment led Chris to delay his participation in The Abba Project by a year. James worked a job that involved a great deal of travel, and he was unsure about how this would impact his ability to attend the monthly group meetings. Dr.

Watson was insistent about regular participation in the group, and James was able to find a way to make this happen—though it wasn't easy:

My admin actually managed my calendar, and so I told her, “Hey, Susan, you’re going to see this thing on my calendar every Monday once a month.” And I said, “I won’t travel before or after it, so hold the dates for me and don’t let me break it.” You know, “Don’t let me say yes to client work.”

After deciding to participate in the group, James needed to become creative and sacrificial in following through. On one occasion he took a red-eye flight the morning after the group, and on another occasion he joined the group via Skype when he couldn't avoid traveling out of state. Involving his administrative assistant, Susan, in his scheduling provided James with a powerful experience that motivated his continued involvement:

She came back and every time she'd see it on my calendar she'd remind me, and she's like, “I just want you to know, I wish my dad would have done this.” And so that kind of reminded me of how important this is, where my 38-year-old admin is saying, “I wish my dad would have done this.”

Despite the significant commitment of time and energy, many fathers described the once-a-month format as appealing. Brad had been a part of weekly counseling for his daughter Alyssa and found it difficult to accommodate:

The other big hurdle in any of the counseling situations for me has been the time commitment. You know, there are people I guess who go once a week, and I can't. My life is too busy with four kids and a job. And I work an hour away, so I'm commuting. I can't spend an hour a week at this, and I don't want to pay for an hour a week of this.

In his pre-group screening interview with Dr. Watson, Shawn was relieved to learn about the group format and scheduling: “As she described it, for my schedule, I could do that.” Along with the commitment of time, fathers described uncertainty about the group process and setting as a second barrier to be overcome. This subtheme will be explored in the following section.

***Subtheme two: Discomfort or uncertainty about group experience.*** Seven fathers mentioned discomfort or uncertainty about the group as a barrier to participation. Fathers had questions about what would be expected of them in the group, what involvement with other men might look like, and the degree to which vulnerability and exposure might be expected of them. Caleb spoke to all three of these questions when asked to share his thoughts about considering participation in The Abba Project:

I was certainly maybe a little more apprehensive, because it's things that you would never talk about. As they say, most guy conversations are fairly shallow: “How's the weather? How's your sports team doing?” You know, your latest athletic achievement of some sort, or something you did at work. But it's more shallow that way, where you don't get . . . you know, you're always doing okay. And again, I call it “touchy feely.” And I wasn't a touchy-feely guy.

Ben expressed concerns about becoming emotional in front of other men: “It's hard because men are emotional too, and they . . . no man wants to be emotional in front of another guy. Especially if he doesn't know him.” Gary indicated that he was comfortable in a one-on-one setting but less comfortable with an unfamiliar group: “I think the biggest barrier was the group format. It's one thing to have a one-on-one with Michelle, but it's another when you have nine other individual fathers with varying degrees of where their relationship is at.”

Prior negative experiences in all-male environments were a part of some fathers' uncertainty about participating in a men-only group. James shared his own humorous perspective on church-based men's ministries: "I won't even go to men's events anymore because they're always like: 'We're going to serve meat and praise Jesus.' I'm fine with the 'praise Jesus' part and I'm fine with eating meat. . . ." He went on to describe a local men's event which he found to be limiting and uncomfortable, both in terms of its content and setting: "I'm not saying let's do macramé and stained glass windows or anything, but you know, assume your audience is not all Packers fans, or whatever. So I just have a huge bias against [men's events]."

Brad expressed similar sentiments when he mentioned his lack of interest in hunting and sports (areas he has found to be common topics of conversation at men's gatherings) as something that has limited his engagement with other men:

I don't feel like there's any camaraderie I get from being with a bunch of guys who go off and hunt, and whatever. That just doesn't do anything for me. . . . [Men] get riled up about a sports game, and I'm like "Okay, well, whenever that gets over I'll reengage with what's going on here." I'm not sure who's winning what, or who's playing what, or why.

Along with uncertainty about entering into a group setting with other men, time constraints presented the participants with a formidable challenge. Ultimately, each of the participants found a way to overcome these barriers. Their accounts of how they accomplished this provide the second major theme for this research question: *overcoming barriers*.

**Primary theme two: Overcoming barriers.** Although barriers were not insurmountable to these fathers, they were real and needed to be overcome. Because these fathers did find a way to successfully enter and complete a fathering intervention, they were able to speak insightfully

to the personal motivations and circumstances that enabled participation. All 11 fathers endorsed the theme of overcoming barriers to participation, and their responses tended to cluster around two distinct categories. These categories were identified as subthemes and included being motivated by *desperation*, and having some *prior connection* with the group or its leader.

***Subtheme one: Desperation.*** Eight of the fathers described the experience of desperation as critical to their involvement with The Abba Project. While this desperation sometimes focused on a strain in the relationship, it often also involved concerns about daughters making dangerous decisions that put them at risk. Daughters of participants struggled with a wide range of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Among other things, internalizing behaviors included withdrawal, depression, self-injury, and disordered eating. Externalizing behaviors involved defiance, delinquency, substance abuse, and sexual promiscuity. Chris described the issues that his daughter was dealing with at the time he decided to participate in the group: “My daughter, I mean, it got to a point where she didn’t want to eat. She went through a series of cutting. She ran away from home for 48 hours. She got brought home in a police car.” Chris, a combat veteran, spoke about how his experience with his daughter running away compared with his experience in battle: “It’s a hundred times easier to charge the hill . . . to fly into something extremely dangerous and take a bullet than to live through that situation with your child.”

Melissa, Ben’s only daughter, also started acting out in ways that led to police involvement. The strain in his relationship with Melissa left Ben feeling powerless and afraid:

I felt so horrified because I couldn’t protect her. I felt like she was going outside of my umbrella of protection and it terrified me. Because . . . you’ve got to take care of them.

It’s tough, but they need that.

Ben spoke further about how these difficulties motivated him to seek out help:



When she started to do all these things, and I realized I couldn't protect her . . . she wasn't allowing me to protect her. And she started to step out, and that's what . . . that's actually, now that I think about it, that's what helped me to seek out Michelle for sure. As noted earlier, Ben's desperation during this time led him not only to seek out support from The Abba Project, but also to drive one-and-a-half hours each way so that he could attend the monthly meetings.

Brad's daughter, Alyssa, was always somewhat oppositional, but he became increasingly concerned about how this trait might play out during her adolescence, where the stakes seemed much higher:

That's what concerns me the most and was a lot of my motivation. I don't want to end up one of the fathers that come into this counseling thing saying, "My daughter is pregnant; she's run off; she's on drugs." I don't want to see that for her. I love her too much. I want nothing but the best for [her]. And yet, I can see that if you're going to be this willful, it's going to manifest itself in ugly ways, and I just don't want that for her. It is important to note that Brad was motivated not only by fear, but also by love. It was this expression of great concern coupled with a sense of powerlessness that produced the type of desperation that enabled Brad and other fathers to overcome barriers to help seeking.

Like Brad, Dean's love for his daughter motivated him to want more for their relationship. He wasn't content with merely surviving her adolescence; he longed for connection: "I want the full-meal deal. I want everything."

In addition to experiences of desperation, some fathers were helped along toward participation in The Abba Project by their prior connection with Dr. Watson, the group's founder and facilitator.

***Subtheme two: Prior connection.*** Even when they were confronted by difficult circumstances, many fathers were helped to overcome barriers to help seeking by their prior acquaintance with Dr. Watson or with The Abba Project. Six of the fathers mentioned that knowing Dr. Watson or knowing someone who participated in The Abba Project made it easier for them to decide to participate. Perhaps because they were most reluctant about entering an unfamiliar setting where expectations were undefined, numerous fathers mentioned the pre-group interview with Dr. Watson as an important time for gathering information and addressing apprehensions. Shawn spoke at length about the pre-group interview and his acquaintance with The Abba Project as factors that alleviated concerns about participation:

I think some of it was because I knew one of the dads that had participated before, that I'm pretty good friends with. I've known Michelle for a long time. But ultimately anything that was going to make my relationship stronger with my daughter, it was really not a hard decision. And I wasn't really sure what to expect when I went into it. You know, Michelle interviews everybody to make sure it's going to be for them. And as much as she described it, you know, it would be a small group, there's only 12 dads per session . . . And so I really didn't go into it with any reservations. We were going through a little bit of a rough time with my daughter where she was not always making the best decisions or hanging out with the wrong crowd. And I certainly was looking for ways to connect more. I was hoping that there would be some things that I could get out of it . . . I just didn't know what I was getting into exactly.

Like Shawn, a combination of desperation and familiarity helped David overcome barriers to participation in The Abba Project. David knew Dr. Watson prior to joining The Abba Project because his daughter Rachel was her former client, and so David was open to seeking out

support when relations with Rachel became strained. David's involvement in Rachel's treatment helped to break down barriers to participation in The Abba Project: "Okay, well, I trust [Dr. Watson]. So as much as this might be a little uncomfortable for me, I'm willing to give it a shot."

This section of the findings presented the results related to Research Question Two: How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking? Participants described two sets of barriers to participation in the fathering intervention. The first set of barriers involved time commitment, and the second had to do with men's uncertainty about participating in a group setting with other men. These barriers were overcome by the father's desperation (because the relationship or daughter was struggling) and/or by the participants' prior connection with the group or its founder. Themes and subthemes for Research Question Two are summarized in Table 4.5.

Whatever their reason for joining The Abba Project, and whatever barriers they encountered and overcame on their way to participation, all fathers were able to speak to the experience of being a part of a group that was designed to improve their relationship with an adolescent daughter. The third research question explored the experience of participation in such a group.

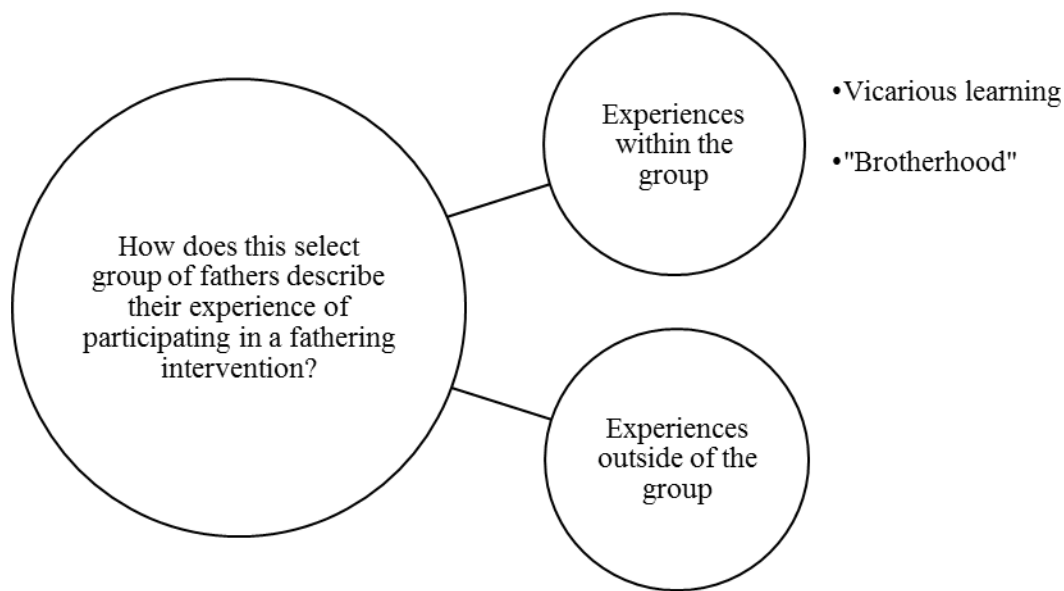
Table 4.5

*Overcoming Barriers to Help Seeking*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># Participants Supporting Theme</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Identified barriers	9	Factors that stood in the way of participation in the group
Time and commitment	8	Balancing group commitment with other obligations, especially work
Discomfort or uncertainty about the group	7	Uncertainty about what to expect in a group setting with other men
Overcoming barriers	11	Factors that enabled these men to overcome barriers to participation in the group
Desperation	8	Relationship or daughter was in crisis; father was desperate to get help
Prior connection	6	Familiarity with the group or acquaintance with the group founder decreased barriers to participation

### **Research Question Three: Findings (Themes) Related to the Experience of Participating in a Fathering Intervention**

The third research question explored fathers' experiences with the intervention: How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention? Two major themes and two subthemes were identified and are presented in Figure 4.3. The first major theme centers on the participants' experiences during sessions of The Abba Project and identifies subthemes of *vicarious learning* and "*brotherhood*" as factors that were important to the group experience. The second major theme has to do with the experiences fathers had outside of the group, specifically in completing "homework" and participating in structured interactions with their daughters.

**Figure 4.3.** Research Question Three Primary Themes and Subthemes

*Figure 4.3.* Research Question Three: How does this select group of fathers describe the experience of participating in a fathering intervention?

**Primary theme one: Experiences within the group.** Because all of the co-researchers participated in the fathering intervention, they were able to speak meaningfully to the experiences they had during group sessions. Although the subthemes of vicarious learning and brotherhood will be explored separately, fathers who endorsed these subthemes were consistent in identifying the group experience as meaningful and important. Echoing the sentiments of other fathers, Gary shared about the importance of the group as a place for learning:

There were great examples, great stories that we could empathize with. And I think that was very important to see it from a different perspective, being able to put yourself in another father's shoes, [understanding the challenges] that he might have had to deal with. And sometimes it was sobering. Those things were very good.

In addition to learning, the group provided fathers with a setting where their insecurities about fathering a daughter could be normalized through shared experience. Craig offered a

colorful depiction of this: “That was kind of the approach, you know: ‘We suck.’ We don’t know what we’re doing . . . and it was like, well, were all sucking together, but we’re all here and we’re all wanting to learn.”

Fathers not only felt a sense of commonality around their shared uncertainty, they were further united by a common love for their daughters and a desire to improve their relationships. Caleb spoke to this issue: “Obviously we had something in common in that we all had daughters. That was why we were there.” United by concern for their daughters, these fathers made the decision to seek out help. Joining with a group of roughly 10 other fathers enabled the participants to gain support and perspective. They were also, notably, able to receive some vicarious learning as they learned about the experiences of other fathers of adolescent daughters.

***Subtheme one: Vicarious learning.*** Nine of the fathers mentioned receiving some benefit from hearing about the experiences of other fathers in their group. In some cases, the benefit came from a positive, hopeful, or encouraging example. At other times, learning resulted from encountering the negative experiences of another father. This was particularly the case for fathers of younger daughters who viewed the relational struggles of those with older daughters as a cautionary tale: something that they still might be able to avoid through deliberate action. Finally, fathers described what might be called neutral examples. This occurred when a father would encounter new ideas and new approaches to something that he was struggling with in his own relationship with his daughter.

Shawn provided an example of learning that generated hope. He was in the midst of a very difficult time with his daughter and was greatly encouraged to learn about the positive relationships that were being experienced by fathers of older daughters:

There are some [dads] that had really good relationships, and regular date nights. Or some had daughters out of state and they made plans regularly to go see them. And I was hoping that I would have that with my daughter, wherever she lived. . . . So I think for me, it wasn't so much a look into the future as it was [a] hope that I would have a relationship like that where it would stay constant. Because at the time when I was in The Abba Project, our daughter was struggling. And so we weren't really sure about the immediate future. That is kind of what it brought me: Hopefully we can get back to this normalcy.

Having weathered some storms in his relationship with his daughter, Shawn is now experiencing a relationship that is much like those he admired.

Gary provided an example of learning from the failures of other fathers:

To be quite honest, what I remember more than anything is how to not address tough or difficult situations. Because I could see what it could lead to if it's allowed to fester. And so one of my take-home points was: Address those quickly. Don't let them fester. Some of that festering led to chasms that were multiple-years wide for some of the dads who hadn't talked to their daughter a lot.

Chris is another father who saw strained relationships with older daughters as a warning:

I was fortunate in some ways because there were some gentlemen in there that had daughters that were in their 20s. You know, out of the house. And in many ways they were trying to figure out, "Where did my relationship go?" And in some ways, the door or window had closed.

Even as he looked forward with caution, Chris also expressed a desire to return to an earlier phase in the relationship so that he could implement some of his learning at that stage. Speaking

of his observations of fathers with younger daughters, Chris explained, “There were some aspects where I was jealous, because I was like, man, I wish I had about three more years to rewind it all, but I don’t.”

Finally, some fathers were able to expand their fathering repertoire by taking suggestions or trying out new approaches that were employed by other fathers in the group. David was an example of this, and he approached his participation in the group with an eagerness to learn and try new things:

Everybody is different, obviously, but you got to see maybe what works for one person didn’t work for another. And then you kind of go, “Oh, maybe I’ll try this approach next time.” So those things were really good. And anything you do, those successes and those setbacks, we all can learn. And then we take those and apply them to our specific relationships. And it was a great learning experience.

Dean shared about the success he found after trying out a new approach to connecting with his adolescent daughters. Frustrated by the fact that his daughters would not answer his phone calls, he was encouraged by another father to try texting. This simple change led to a major breakthrough, as Dean explains:

As we shared with each other, you shared your story with the group, and people said, “Wow, maybe I’ll try that.” And one of the things I shared was, “Well, my girls never really hardly ever answer when I call them.” In fact, that was an interesting one. I used to call them every day and they’d never answer. I was like, “That’s a problem.” So then I started texting. Well, the next thing you know, we’re texting. Well . . . they text! They don’t talk on the phone. But what’s interesting is, now about once a week, they will pick



up the phone. I will call and they'll answer. Now when I call, which is not every day, they answer.

Being in a place where they could feel comfortable sharing about their needs and struggles within the group required that men achieved a sense of security and connection there. That aspect of the group is explored in the next subtheme of brotherhood.

***Subtheme two: Brotherhood.*** The subtheme of brotherhood is drawn directly from content of The Abba Project, where participants were encouraged to view the group as a “band of brothers.” It was supported by nine of the 11 co-researchers. Some fathers expressed mixed feelings about the brotherhood label, though they largely did recognize the group as a place for support, encouragement, and understanding. Some fathers, like Chris and Ben, pushed back on the “band of brothers” designation because of their different and meaningful experiences with a deeper form of brotherhood in previous male work environments (Chris in combat with the Army, and Ben as a long-time fireman). Despite this reluctance to embrace the term “band of brothers,” both of these men expressed positive attitudes toward relationships and experiences in the group.

Describing his experience in The Abba Project, Chris stated,

It was both unique and very helpful to be around a group of like-minded men. The participating fathers had daughters across a wide range of ages, and those shared perspectives brought together both freshness and value to the dialogue. While some fathers were more willing [than others] to share, it didn't detract from the overall interaction.

Ben became more comfortable in the group as bonds began to develop: “I can't remember when the stuff started to kind of break, but it did at some point. The ice started to

break.” He viewed humor as an important aspect of this bonding, stating, “Once humor started being injected, guys started to loosen up. It really helped guys start to kind of be okay with each other.”

During the course of conducting the interviews, it became apparent that this bonding happened at different rates for each cycle of the group. Regardless of the pace of bonding, it was characterized by a number of key factors that received frequent mention by the co-researchers. Initially, fathers identified with one another through their shared desire to succeed in their relationships with their daughters. David, a father who wholeheartedly embraced the “band of brothers” designation, explained:

There were going to be another eight or 10 dads that were going through similar, although different, battles. And the common goal that drew us all together was the desire to have a better, or build a better relationship with our daughters.

Building upon this initial connection point, the groups tended to deepen as fathers became increasingly vulnerable. In later stages, some of the groups were characterized by a withholding of judgment, a willingness to be vulnerable, an ability to challenge one another, and agreement to hold one another accountable.

For Shawn, the lack of judgment was essential to full participation: “I didn’t want to be judged on how I did it [fathering], be it right or wrong, and—cross my fingers—it was right.” James likened the group to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting where everyone present had a shared struggle. He explained this commonality as the reason for a lack of judgment in the group:

I think that really quickly they figured out that these guys all had something in common and we all loved our daughters. And so then you're willing to let the walls come down. And you know, nobody was judging, because we're all there.

In the absence of judgment, and in the presence of shared circumstances and mutual support, fathers felt free to be open and vulnerable about their struggles. Kevin reflected on the difficulty that men often have in being vulnerable and achieving genuine intimacy: "Men really want to have intimate relationships with other men, but they don't know how to get there because of the way we're wired. I could see that, and I think it's that vulnerability piece."

As participants in the groups bonded, they became increasingly invested in one another's success. This led to the introduction of careful but direct challenge and a level of accountability. Dean mentioned providing encouragement while also pointing out another father's focus on his own needs rather than those of his daughter. Similarly, James related an incident in which he prompted another father to think about what he was saying: "I'm like, really? You're saying that, but I don't really think you believe that." Accountability took a number of forms but was most clearly felt by fathers knowing that they would have to report back to the group on dates with their daughters and other between-session assignments. Simply knowing that they would have to give a report in front of their fellow group members was something that Brad identified as motivating:

It did provide an accountability process, knowing that come meeting day we're going to have to account to the others and tell them, "Yeah, this is how the date went. We did this and it worked well." Or, "Gee, I really blew it this month and we couldn't even talk," or whatever the discourse was going to be about it. We knew that was coming, so you're kind of like, "We've got to get our date in."

The expectation of accountability helped to promote fathers' engagement and follow-through with between-session homework and relational activities. The meaning and experience with between-session work is a theme that will be presented in the section that follows.

**Primary theme two: Experiences outside of the group.** Because The Abba Project only met once a month for nine months, much of the work of the group was accomplished through between-session activities. While these activities included reviewing additional materials and personal reflection, the major focus for participants in this study was on the dates and interactive assignments that they completed with their daughters. Generally, dates involved fathers and daughters participating in a shared outing and engaging with a series of questions that were designed to help them get to know each other better. Fathers reported vastly different feelings toward and experiences of these dates. In this way, the dates served as a sort of litmus test on the current state of relations with their daughters.

Craig's first date with his daughter, Karen, was characterized by eagerness and innocence. In contrast, Caleb described his initial outings with his daughter, Allison, as "awkward first dates." Using another analogy, Caleb explained: "It felt like I was interviewing her for a job." For Caleb and Allison, this was, in a very real sense, a process of becoming better acquainted. Shawn's experience with the dating assignments was even more challenging. He explained:

I was in a situation where my daughter was pretty defiant, so it was hard to get her to go out on dates. I wanted to fill out all the worksheets and talk about some of the exercises we were assigned to do in our week's time. Sometimes she would comply. Sometimes she wasn't interested at all. I would look for ways, and maybe it wasn't on a date. I got to be pretty creative. She's in her room, and instead of leaving the comfort of her room,

I'm sitting on her floor talking about and asking her these questions, and just telling her to take her time on what she wants to share, and no answer is a bad answer. And if you're not comfortable then we can move on to the next question. So I gave her opportunities.

Despite these vastly different dating experiences, the critical factor for each father was his deliberate effort to pursue and cultivate a relationship with his daughter.

Though awkward and frequently uncomfortable, this pursuit often proved to be decisive in reorienting father-daughter relationships. Ben described his own experience with asking the structured questions that were provided for dates:

When those words came out of my mouth, it was like I could see that . . . I wish I could have said those things without the prompts. But at the same time, they came out of my mouth and she just melted.

The results of these structured assignments were not always so dramatic, but fathers were consistent in identifying the between-session homework as an important factor in changing the dynamics of their relationships with their adolescent daughters.

Findings related to the third research question were presented in this section: How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention? Participants' responses tended to focus on their experiences within the group and on their between-group homework assignments. Experiences within the group emphasized themes related to vicarious learning and the sense of brotherhood that developed among participants. The predominant between-group experience for the participants was their involvement in structured activities, or "dates," with their daughters. Table 4.6 provides an overview of themes and subthemes that were reviewed in this section.

The next section will look more directly at how fathers experienced the changes that were brought about by their participation in The Abba Project. \

Table 4.6

*Experience of Participating in a Fathering Intervention*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># Participants Supporting Theme</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Experiences within the group	11	Interaction with the content and the experience
Vicarious learning	9	Opportunity to learn from the experiences of other fathers
Brotherhood	9	Group seen as supportive and encouraging Some mixed feelings about “brotherhood”
Experiences outside of the group	10	Between-group assignments focused on interaction with materials and activities with daughter(s)

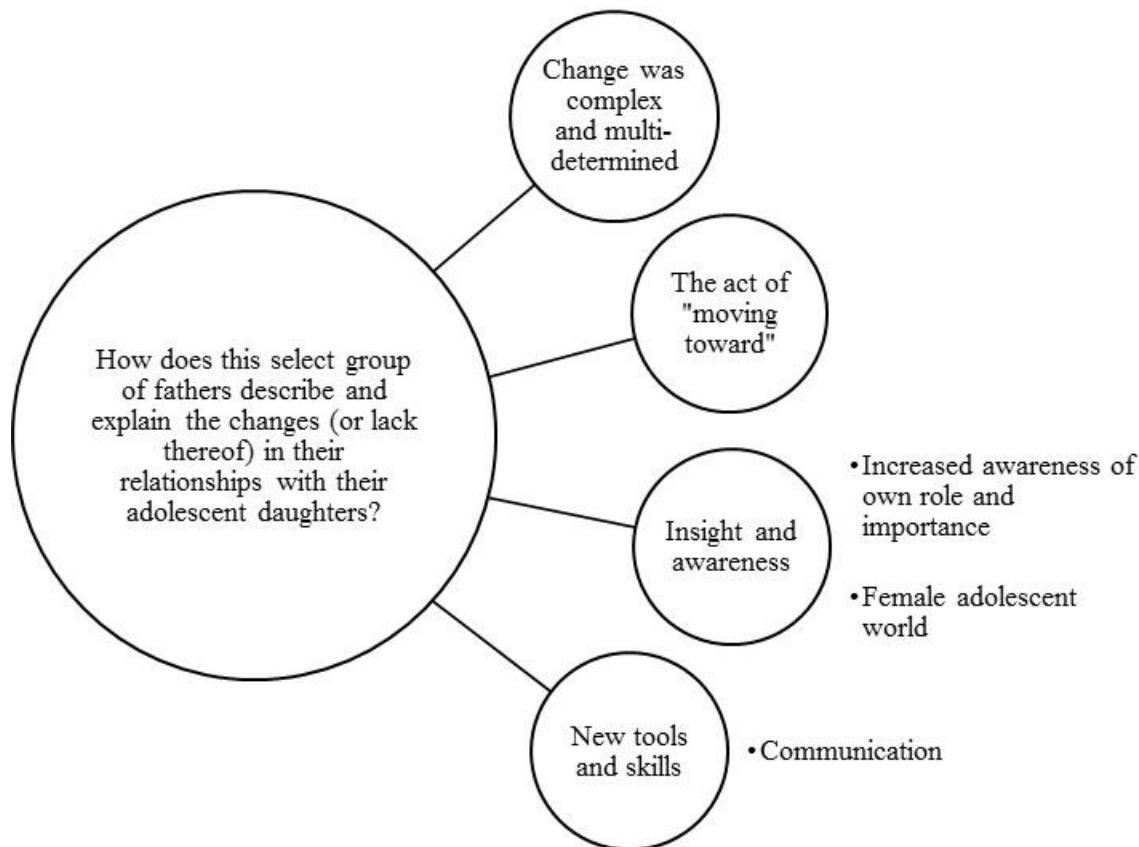
**Research Question Four: Findings (Themes) Related to Changes in the Relationship**

Building on fathers’ experiences with The Abba Project, the fourth research question prompted fathers to consider how participation in the intervention impacted their relationships with their adolescent daughter(s). This question asked: How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group? The data for this research question yielded four themes and three subthemes. Figure 4.4 provides a graphic representation of the relationship between these themes and subthemes.

Of all the themes that emerged from the data on this research question, two were directly linked with the content and assignments of The Abba Project. Fathers credited the group with

providing important insights and a range of new relational tools. Empowered by their deliberate efforts to connect, these insights and tools enabled fathers to engage with their daughters in deeper and more relationally productive ways.

**Figure 4.4.** Research Question Four Primary Themes and Subthemes



*Figure 4.4.* Research Question Four: How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters?

**Primary theme one: Change was complex and multi-determined.** Because participants varied in terms of the amount of time that has elapsed since they participated in The Abba Project, some fathers had a longer window of opportunity for observing relational changes. This variable seemed to have an impact on the extent to which fathers attributed relational changes directly to The Abba Project or to a multitude of other factors. Some fathers, like Ben,

saw participation in the group as a “game changer.” Like a few other fathers, he mentioned that the mere decision to focus on his relationship with his daughter, Melissa, through involvement in a fathering intervention sparked a change in her—though this spark needed some time before it ignited a flame:

It was huge when Melissa realized what I was doing. And I’d come home with this homework, and I’d take her out on these dates. And I had this big three-ring binder notebook that I kept everything in. After a while, she’d go, “Oh, the notebook again.” But she loved it. She loved every minute of it. . . . At first she didn’t. She thought that there was some kind of gimmick or something.

For 9 months, Ben continued to pursue Melissa through participation in the group and structured time together. Eventually she realized that his investment was not a passing fad and she began to open up to deeper relationship.

Although his involvement in The Abba Project was focused on his middle daughter, Sarah, Dean saw the group as instrumental in improving his relationships with each of his three daughters:

I was trying to work on three girls [laughing], three daughters. And we had this meeting and we learned all this information. Prior to starting [The Abba Project], I’d read Michelle’s book, and it was . . . it was a lot of information. But I had a pretty good background. And I was trying some of the things that were called out in the book. Then when I did The Abba Project, I was trying to do dates with all three daughters. And the oldest daughter was older and mature [24 at the time], and she realized that there was some opportunity with Dad there. So we had some totally different experiences. And I didn’t keep pursuing as much detail with her, just because of the time element. I mean,



she was across town. But the fact that she knew I was doing this; she saw a change and she benefited. Sarah was all ears. She was the one that suggested I do it. [My youngest daughter] was a little tentative and sort of like: “Well, I think things are good.” But then as time went on and they knew it wasn’t just a project for Dad, that it was just really . . . Dad was really trying to be a better Dad. Things really started to flourish over probably six or nine months. And so it was a different experience [with each of the three girls]. But we all moved from the left to the right.

Asked about this last statement, Dean explained:

We all got connected. We have a relationship now we never had before. I’d say they look up to me. They respect me. They honor me. And I look at them totally differently. I accept them for who they are. They motivate me to be a role model of a dad. They’re proud of me. They tell their friends about me: “My dad is cool. He is so nice.” You know? That’s kind of amazing, right—that your girls want to show you off and tell their friends about you and want you to be around their friends? A lot of girls don’t want their dad around at all.

Many of the fathers who were farther out from their participation in The Abba Project saw the group as one factor among many that led to improved relations with their daughter(s). Some girls, like Kevin’s daughter Claire and David’s daughter Rachel, were seen as having “aged out” of a more turbulent and oppositional stage of development. Early adulthood proved to be a more harmonious and enjoyable time of relations for both of these fathers. Other fathers attributed significant changes in the relationship to daughters receiving specialized individual treatment. This was the case for Shawn, who saw participation in the group as an important factor but not the sole determinant of his improved relations with his daughter, Sophia:

Our situation was unique in that shortly after The Abba Project concluded for me, my daughter was in a spot where we made the decision, my wife and I, to send her to [a residential treatment program]. And she was there for about twenty months, where she really needed to get her act together. And quite honestly, Michelle was the one who recommended we do this because she met with us and I shared some of the struggles. So it really wasn't The Abba Project that got my daughter and me to be as close as we are today.

Despite the fact that he looked beyond The Abba Project to explain the changes that he has experienced in his relationship with Sophia, Shawn acknowledged the role that the group had in impacting his ongoing approach to this relationship: "Some of the things that I still do, I got those ideas from The Abba Project. And things are great with my daughter and me now. But I still do some of those things that I learned from it."

In a similar way, Brad saw the things he learned through participation in the group as supplementing other treatment that his daughter Alyssa received. Alyssa started taking psychotropic medication as a part of her treatment for a mood disorder. Brad described this as "very effective" and indicated that "it helped [Alyssa] balance her emotions." He explained that this treatment "didn't entirely coincide, but it kind of coincided with my participation in this project. So I don't know. You know, a combination of those two things have led to being able to have a better relationship."

Whether changes were attributed directly to participation in The Abba Project or to a combination of factors, all 11 fathers indicated that significant positive changes had taken place in their relationships with their daughter(s). Broadly speaking, these changes tended to involve a

decision on the part of fathers to “move toward” their daughters in a deliberate way. This act of moving toward daughters was the second primary theme for this research question.

**Primary theme two: The act of moving toward.** The act of moving toward daughters took many forms and was endorsed by 10 of the participants. The changes associated with this movement grew out of fathers’ growing awareness of their importance to their daughters and reflected the deliberate ways that they learned to put this awareness into practice. In many instances, fathers’ movement toward their daughters involved increased investments of time and renewed effort to connect in novel ways. David explained how these initiatives were expressed in his relationship to his daughter Rachel:

What I learned is that intentional investment of time—whether that’s a text message, a phone call, or a pre-arranged date night—those things that I have learned to do that I hadn’t done in the past because I just didn’t know I needed to or should. And the results of doing that have been much more positive in building our relationship than not doing it.

Daughters were sometimes unsure of how to receive this focused initiative from their fathers. The previous section described how Ben’s efforts to pursue his daughter, Melissa, were initially met with skepticism. Brad encountered a similar phenomenon when reaching out to his daughter Alyssa: “Early on there was a great apprehension of like, ‘Well, now what are you trying to do? How are you trying to change me now? Why do you think that’s going to work to change who I am?’” Brad reassured Alyssa by explaining the motivation behind his renewed efforts to connect:

I said flat out: “Honey, I’m not going to this [group] for you. This is for me, because I’ve got to change.” And I think it did [change]. I hope it did, and I hope she receives it in

that manner. I mean that was not for her to get better. It was to help me relate to her better.

More than merely increasing the quantity of their contact, fathers were deliberate about improving its quality. Sometimes this required humility and extra effort. Both James and Craig described the new ways that they pursued reconciliation with their daughters when there had been some sort of relational rupture. James mentioned that his father, now deceased, had never apologized to him. He wanted to do things differently with his daughter, Anna. He mentioned an occasion when he hurt Anna's feelings and described his effort to both apologize and seek her forgiveness. In recounting this experience, he explained his motivation for reaching out as he did:

I just want to have those moments where it's okay to be wrong. We all are, and it's okay to tell them that you know that you're wrong. I think that that's been a big difference. I don't want her leaving our house questioning where her relationship is with me.

Craig explained that he has also sought to be deliberate in pursuing relationship with his daughter, Karen, when things get off track:

She still needs me to be her daddy, and I'm trying to be attentive enough to catch those moments. Because I know I miss moments or, you know, she's giving me a message and I miss it. And what I try to do is go back to her, go sit on the edge of her bed and say, "You know, I missed that. I heard that, but I missed that when you needed something."

Numerous fathers described a pattern in which their movement toward their daughter resulted in a reciprocal movement on the daughter's part. After years of pursuing his daughter, Melissa, with phone calls, Ben now receives regular phone calls from her. Dean has experienced

the same thing with his three daughters. David described the fruit that has come from the seeds of connection that he sowed with his daughter Rachel during the past few years:

Originally when we first started this, however many years ago it was, the relationship was still strained. So it was more of me initiating and her not responding. And now it's the opposite in that she's initiating and I'm obviously responding [laughing].

In many ways, fathers' consistent movement toward their daughters established new expectations for the relationship. Daughters learned that a connection was important to fathers, and over time they became active partners in sustaining that connection. Fathers' pursuit of daughters flowed out of their desire for something more in the relationship. It also grew from their burgeoning understanding of their paternal importance and their daughters' specific developmental needs. The following section explores the generation of these insights.

**Primary theme three: Insight and awareness.** Each of the 11 participants described the acquisition of new insight and awareness as essential to the changes that they experienced during their involvement with The Abba Project. Because the intervention was both experiential and psychoeducational, a substantial amount of information on paternal importance and daughters' development was presented during sessions. Since these two areas were consistently identified in the fathers' narratives, they have both been identified as subthemes for further explication.

Fathers acquired insight about themselves and their daughters at a time when they were actively reaching out in new and more intentional ways. The insights they acquired served to both motivate and guide their efforts toward intentional engagement. James likened this coupling of awareness and behavior to his prior participation in Weight Watchers:

You definitely come out of this thinking differently about the relationship. And I think it changes the way that you process about being around your kid. Because it's like anything else; you know, before I did Weight Watchers, I didn't really care what the nutritional information was. But then you spend 16 weeks trying to lose five pounds or whatever, and then suddenly you're like, "You know what, that butter is not worth it." You know, because you have knowledge. And so I think that we've spent all this time investing with your kid, and seeing the lights go on, and seeing confidence change . . . or seeing her confidence to come to you and say, "Dad, you really messed up here," or whatever. So you don't . . . you won't go back. I don't think that you'll regress.

Chris explained that participation in the group provided him with a completely "new lens" through which he could view himself, his daughter, and their shared relationship. The same was true for Caleb. Through participation in The Abba Project, Caleb gained an appreciation for the vital role he played in the life of his daughter, Allison. Before joining the group, he assumed that the absence of major problems with Allison meant that everything was fine: "I often maybe took things for granted; of course there's nothing wrong because she's not screaming and crying in front of me. So everything must be going well kind of thing." As he learned about Allison's deeper needs, Caleb was motivated to increase his investment in their shared relationship. Caleb's enriched understanding of paternal importance reflects a subtheme that was broadly supported by the data and will be explored in the next section.

***Subtheme one: Increased awareness of own role and importance.*** All 11 fathers gained an enriched understanding of their power and potential as fathers. They described their role as an indispensable one that carried with it both responsibility and opportunity. Although many fathers entered The Abba Project with an existing sense of their importance, participation in the

group served to enrich and ennoble their understanding of the vital role they would play in the lives of their children. Like other fathers, Shawn was utterly convinced of this reality:

The father-daughter relationship is amazing, and girls need their dad. Period! End of story! They need them. And it could be a deadbeat dad, or it could be the dad that gives them everything. They need their dads. And that has rung so true for me throughout these [years] . . . you know certainly my whole life with her being born. But especially in these last years, where I thought I had lost her. And being able to communicate with her in new ways that I hadn't been [able to] before. But if you think that your daughter can do it without you, that it's not that big of a deal, you couldn't be more wrong. And I will take that to the bank until the end of time. So that would be my swan song: Daughters need their dads! Period. Period. Period.

In his strong affirmation of the necessity of paternal engagement, Shawn places particular emphasis on the importance of fathers' involvement during daughters' adolescence. Admittedly, involvement at this stage can be more complicated and disorienting to fathers than earlier stages of the relationship. With all of the changes that daughters are experiencing during adolescence, they may be especially in need of the steadying influence that their fathers can provide.

Kevin experienced the adolescence of his three daughters as a challenge but was quick to emphasize the positive results that followed from his consistent involvement:

I think that whole intimacy, dating your daughter, relationship-building thing . . . they want to know through thick and thin that [you are there for them]. You know, my youngest daughter, she goes, "How did you guys put up with me? I was terrible." She's 21 now [17 at the time of Kevin's participation in The Abba Project], and looking back 2 years and saying, "I was horrible to you guys." And so the fact that you're like Steady

Eddie . . . you just keep showing up. It's that door-to-door salesman that you slam the door in his face 20 times and he keeps showing up: "Hello, Mr. Jones." [laughing]. Because it's a consistency thing. And you've got to realize there's life at the end of it. But it's not something that emotionally you can give up on or check out on or get angered by or whatever. And not to say that I didn't, or that it doesn't appear to be a giant mountain to climb at the time. You do your best.

Although it was enhanced through participation in The Abba Project, some fathers like Shawn and Kevin had an intuitive sense of their importance to their daughters. Other fathers, like Caleb, steadily grew into this awareness. Caleb related an incident that occurred prior to his involvement in the group that demonstrates his profound learning in this area:

Again, it's one of those things that you don't see that there's a problem: I'm providing and doing what I should be doing, and I'm certainly receptive if she needs to see me. But I recall the one time, and again I could probably be . . . maybe I don't pick up clues, maybe as a person as well as the next person . . . but when my wife recommended that I take my daughter out on a date, it would never have occurred to me to do that. And . . . I think it made a huge impact for my daughter to do that. And I think I only did it once, possibly twice, before my wife passed away, and it was completely on her urging. It wasn't something that I would have come up with on my own.

Participation in The Abba Project provided Caleb with an expanded view of his fathering role. Although he remained somewhat demure about the ways he enacted this awareness, his increased effort in the area of emotional connection was apparent:

I'll say it was nowhere near perfect, and maybe even saying I was pushing [perfect] is even giving me too much credit. But I think I tried. I didn't know what I didn't know. I



think I was trying to do the best I could, but maybe [I] could've gotten more maybe father skills or parenting skills or something at the time. But yeah, thinking you were doing the right thing when you didn't know that maybe you could have been doing more . . . providing more, at least as far as the emotional side went.

Caleb followed up this self-assessment by describing the many ways that he now seeks to regularly connect with his daughter, Allison. Although he feels that he could have been more active earlier in their relationship, the enhanced awareness of his importance to his daughter has informed his fathering approach in the 5 years since he participated in The Abba Project.

Fathers' learning about their importance coincided with their learning about the world their daughters inhabit. As they learned through experience and through participation in The Abba Project, this is a challenging world that is fraught with numerous hardships. Fathers benefited from acquiring general information about their daughters' development, but they benefited even more from learning about issues of special importance to the *female adolescent world*.

***Subtheme two: Female adolescent world.*** All 11 fathers shared information that supported the importance of gaining insight into their daughters' experience. Key insights into their daughters' adolescent world tended to center around female development and the impact of culture. These two sets of issues were frequently intertwined, as can be seen in the numerous stories fathers shared about their daughters' struggles with self-esteem and body image. Although these issues may be considered developmentally normal—the routine practices of self-discovery and coping with physical changes brought on by puberty—they were experienced in a culture that was perceived to be both unrealistic and demanding. Participants explained that societal messages related to female beauty and a contentious peer culture came together in

making daughters feel inadequate and insecure. Caleb spoke to his learning in this area and noted that it was not something that he experienced in his own adolescent development:

It's just interesting looking at the material, which seemed common sense, but as a guy I didn't have . . . image issues and things. I was a smaller, skinnier guy, but I didn't internalize that and say . . . I guess I didn't get that [message]: "I have to always look good. I always have to be a certain way." I'm just pretty kind of plain Jane. And I started seeing how this image in the media and things portray women in a different way. They've got a lot more, maybe, expectations on them.

Challenges related to peer relationships and the frequent hostility of female classmates were unhappy discoveries for Kevin. He described how this played a part in diminishing his daughter Claire's fragile adolescent self-image:

You enter the junior high years where the girls get their own little social groups and they can . . . I think what I learned is that girls can be mean. Girls enter junior high, high school, and it is a very aware point of self-image for them.

James described the experience of his daughter, Anna, as being remarkably similar:

Mean girls are everywhere, you know, and [issues related to] body image are real. It's amazing to me. And you think you send them to Christian school and they're going to get a hall pass on that. They don't. And so I just want to make sure that Anna knows [how I feel about her].

Gaining an appreciation for how messages about body image could be received by adolescent girls prompted Ben to change the way he spoke around his daughter, Melissa. Accustomed to working in a setting where he routinely had to assist and rescue people of all

shapes and sizes, Ben became aware of how his stories from work might be heard by Melissa.

Once he realized this, he became intentional about moderating his communication:

One of the big things, as I look back on it, like when she was going through junior high, girls are so conscious of their body. And they and their bodies are changing. And she got a little chubby and everything, and it was devastating. You know, with the other kids, it was devastating to her. But I realized that I'd get home from a call [as a fireman] and I'd tell everybody and all of the family about this person: "Man, this person weighed 600 pounds and we had to cut the window out and get her out through a door," or something like that. And [at that time] I had sons, so I mean, I've never been like a mean person at all. And I don't ever really remember doing this, because if somebody would have said, "Don't talk about body image in front of your daughter," I would have said, "Well, I don't." But that message was something that she had in her mind from the beginning. . . .

And I would tell her when she was in junior high, I'd say stuff, helpful things [laughing], like: "Hey, we should work out." And they're smart. They know. And so that was . . . I wish I wouldn't have done that, you know? I wish I would have known: Never talk about a negative . . . a body image negatively in front of your daughter.

Because they're like sponges. Especially in junior high, they are desperate.

As Ben's narrative makes clear, fathers combined learning about the issues confronting their daughters with developing an understanding of their own importance. In many cases, this enabled fathers to speak directly to their daughters' uncertainty and insecurity by affirming their beauty, their identity, and their value. The affirmation that flowed from this awareness will be further explored in the review that accompanies the next research question.

One final area of the female adolescent world that garnered significant mention was daughters' interaction with aspects of contemporary culture, especially social media. Many fathers saw social media platforms like Facebook and Snapchat as a minefield to be avoided. At the same time, they recognized the important place that these technologies held in their daughters' social and cultural worlds. As a former high school principal, Craig was well acquainted with both the wholesome and unwholesome ways that these technologies could be used. This caused him to be reluctant about allowing his daughter, Karen, to open a Snapchat account:

And what did she want for her birthday? Well, she wanted Snapchat. Well, I was the principal of a high school and Snapchat was new and it was from the devil. I remember having to videotape opening a student's Snapchat because she was worried that she was getting some nasty text or whatever. It was just being used so poorly, and I'm sure it still is.

Craig eventually worked through this issue with Karen, but his experience with the challenges associated with social media serve to demonstrate the complexity of the cultural world that fathers are attempting to help their daughters navigate. As with other areas of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, effective navigation of these challenges requires that fathers develop a whole new set of skills.

**Primary theme four: New tools and skills.** In addition to increasing insight and awareness, The Abba Project provided fathers with a new set of tools and skills that they could actively implement in their relationships with their daughters. Ten fathers indicated that the acquisition of new tools and skills helped to equip them for their fathering role. Participants seemed to embrace the active language that was implied by the concept of relational tools. Ben

spoke to the inadequacy of his previous repertoire of skills and tools when it came to dealing with his daughter, Melissa:

And Michelle's group really . . . gave me so many tools that I could begin to understand [and use]. I felt like I came to a gunfight with a butter knife before. She really just gave me all these things and perspectives [especially with] seeing the other guys going through basically the same thing I was. Really, I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have that with Melissa.

Shawn described how coupling new tools and new insights enhanced his fathering:

It absolutely is a combination of both. You know, here's what tool you're going to use for this. Sometimes you don't need a hammer for a thumbtack type of thing. Sometimes it's a simple gesture of walking beside her, grabbing her hand, and reminding her that she has value.

Drawing from the same metaphor, Chris explained that the group helped him to put "some new tools in the toolbox." Elsewhere, he commented that The Abba Project helped him to "retool himself." When asked about specific tools that he has implemented, Chris explained that he learned to increase the ratio of positive versus corrective comments that he directs to his daughter: "The ratio needs to be five to one or 10 to one, positive to negative. With her it might as well be 50 to one. And so it's like, hey, I've retooled myself, 10 good things to one." Chris spoke with wonder about the effectiveness that one specific phrase had in improving his conversations with his daughter, Cate:

And I guess that one of the tools that [Dr. Watson] introduced . . . it sounded simple and you're kind of like, "Hold on, hey, this is kind of hokey." But I would ask a question and get a funny response from my daughter. And then one of the things that [Dr. Watson]

taught us was basically: “Hey, Cate, I was wondering . . .” And those three words, it was like . . . you know, it was incredible . . . It helps you to soften your tone. It will help to promote more of an open dialogue. And I was questioning this and then I started using this thing, and I’m like, “Yes, it works well.” So whenever it’s more of a tougher subject on something, or I’m not quite sure what her response might be, I always preface a question with those three words: “I was wondering.”

The use of one simple tool seemed to work wonders for Chris and Cate. It is worthwhile to note that this tool had to do with communication—the most frequently mentioned area where new tools and skills were applied, and the next subtheme for review.

***Subtheme one: Communication.*** Of all the tools and skills that fathers acquired, they particularly prized those that improved their ability to communicate with their daughters ( $n = 9$ ). Participation in The Abba Project helped fathers to be more deliberate about the ways that they spoke, listened, and attended to their daughters. Fathers also acquired a variety of new tools, like texting and sending notes, which enabled them to convey their support and concern apart from direct conversation. Much of what fathers learned also had to do with the timing and the tone of their messages. The data provided by participants supported each of these areas of learning.

Numerous fathers recognized that they had a hard time being relationally present for their daughters, even when they were physically present. By practicing active and attentive listening, they became better able to convey their interest in their daughters and were further enabled to connect with and learn about them. Shawn spoke to the difference it made once he learned to really listen to his daughter:

As I got a little more in tune with the kids there were some simple things that really made a difference. Be it turning off the TV when they want to talk to you, or when you’re done

with dinner, sitting around talking and finding out about them versus really eat and run, just go[ing] on to do your next thing. And those things are becoming really valuable. But I think the biggest lesson I learned, even to this day, which I try to exercise all the time with the kids, is when they want to talk to me, they know I am listening and not trying to multitask too much. And I think it makes a huge difference. It certainly did for me with parenting the kids, and especially my daughter. I think that she feels valued when I'm listening to her. I think that's a really, really big deal.

David also has become more aware of his need to practice attentive listening: "I'm the first one to admit that my mind's multitasking, even though men aren't great multitaskers. And I have to do a better job of making sure I listen and then give feedback." Listening was an area of growth for Brad as well: "I think I learned to listen better, or I'm learning to listen better to what they actually are saying to me, rather than making my own presumptions of what I think they're saying."

More than just being present and attentive, fathers mentioned the importance of maintaining a nonjudgmental, nonreactive posture in their communication. Doing so enabled some fathers to enjoy more open relationships with their daughters, especially as they engaged on difficult topics. Dean spoke about his measured and mutual approach to hard conversations:

Children need to know that they are safe asking you a question. They know where they stand with you and they know, beyond all, that they are safe with you, asking you questions, and knowing that they won't be judged, or ridiculed, or blasted for questions, or sharing concerns or curiosities. Children need to know that the parent is the adult in the relationship and can maintain emotional control in any instance.

Gary explained how an adjustment in posture has enabled him to talk with his daughter, Julia, about a very tough subject:

Yeah, I think we're more willing to address difficult topics. A difficult topic for her, and will continue to be for a while, is [the relationship between her mom and me (divorce)]. So we always talk a little bit about that, where I don't know if we would have the tools to do it before. A lot of this is trust: "Julia, you've got to trust me. I'm going to trust you. And never belie that trust."

Beyond their direct engagement in conversations, fathers benefited from learning about other more passive ways that they could convey messages to their daughters. In addition to texting, multiple fathers increased their use of writing notes as a way to express love and show concern. The Abba Project directly encouraged fathers to write notes, and many of them were surprised to see the impact these missives had on their daughters. Shawn shared about the creative ways he used notes in connecting with his daughter:

Things are great with [us] now, but I'll still do some of those things that I learned in The Abba Project, like taking a marker and writing on her mirror so that she sees it in the morning, or sending her a text just out of the blue.

This section presented findings related to the fourth research question: How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group? Participants indicated that changes to the relationship with their adolescent daughters were complex and associated with a variety of factors. While The Abba Project was an important part of the change process, it was not the only factor. Daughters' participation in outside treatment and their movement through more tumultuous stages of adolescence were also mentioned as contributing



to improvement in the relationship. Fathers expressed a general tendency to move toward their daughters by taking increased initiative for engagement. The group was credited with promoting participants' insight and awareness of the fathering role and the world their daughter(s) inhabited. Fathers reported that they acquired specific skills or tools that enabled them to engage with their daughters more effectively. Skills related to enhancing communication were mentioned as being especially helpful. A summary of the themes and subthemes presented in the current section can be found in Table 4.7.

The changes that fathers made in relating to their daughters—whether they came by way of The Abba Project or simply through acquiring experience—were only a part of their transformation. Many of the participants also spoke about the ways that the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter has profoundly changed them as people. This topic was explored by the fifth research question and is presented in the section that follows.

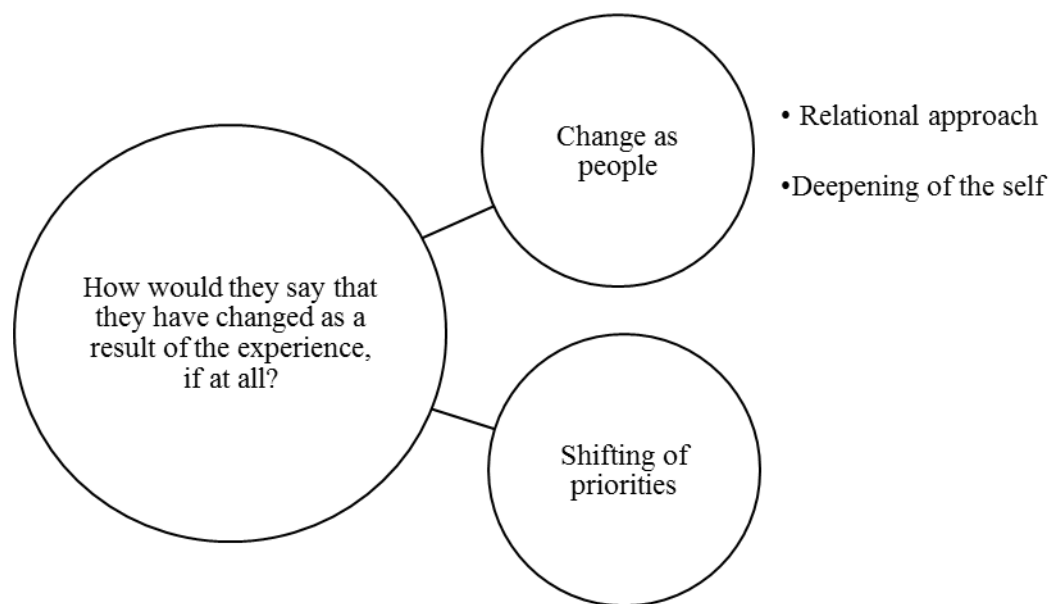
Table 4.7

*Explanation of Changes in Relationship with Daughter Before and After Participating in the Fathering Group*

Theme	# Participants Supporting Theme	Brief Description
Change was complex and multi-determined	10	Consideration of multiple factors that led to relationship change
The act of “moving toward”	10	Intentional investment in the relationship took many forms
Insight and awareness	11	Learning about daughter, self, and their relationship
Increased awareness of own role and importance	11	New understanding of the power and potential fathers have
Female adolescent world	11	Gaining an appreciation of developmental, social, and cultural factors that impact the daughter
New skills and tools	11	Acquisition of new tools for use in the relationship
Communication	9	Learning new ways to talk and listen The importance of tone

### **Research Question Five: Findings (Themes) Related to How Fathers Have Changed as a Result of Their Experience**

The fifth research question explored the ways in which fathers personally changed through participation in The Abba Project and through the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter: How would fathers say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all? The data clustered around two major themes and two subthemes, as can be seen in Figure 4.5. This research question was intended to generate reflection on areas of personal transformation and growth. Much of the information that fathers provided related to more practical areas of change specific to the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, though some narratives also touched upon areas of broader personal change. Primary themes of *change as people* and *shifting of priorities* are explored in the sections that follow.

**Figure 4.5.** Research Question Five Primary Themes and Subthemes*Figure 4.5.* Research Question Five: How would they say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?

**Primary theme one: Change as people.** Ten participants described personal changes that resulted from their experience as fathers of daughters. The clearest areas of growth were seen in the ways that they modified their relational approach and in a general deepening of the self that resulted from experience with fathering. The prominence of these two areas in the participants' narratives led to their inclusion as subthemes.

**Subtheme one: Relational approach.** Even though the focus of The Abba Project was on the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, participants tended to generalize what they learned by applying it to other close personal relationships ( $n = 9$ ). Overall, fathers reported that they became softer, more thoughtful, and more deliberate about the ways they interacted. This change in approach is exemplified by an experience Craig had with his daughter, Karen. Craig's recounting of the experience helps to demonstrate how he moderated his natural response to an

issue that he found deeply troubling. He set the stage for the incident by explaining that Karen had been away at a conference for girls. Many pictures were taken at the event, and Karen updated her profile picture on one of her social media platforms with a picture that Craig found highly suggestive. He explained his reaction and how he eventually chose to approach Karen with his concerns:

I saw this [profile picture], and I thought . . . inside of me, I was like, I wanted it away, gone, now. I was just protective Dad, freaking out a little bit, having to humanize her, with her intention and her adolescence. . . . So I sent her a note and I just said, “Hey, saw your new picture.” I think I said something like, the tone of it was: “It’s not my favorite. You have so many other wonderful pictures.” Something like that. When I went and looked at it again 2 minutes later it was changed. And I believe it was because . . . and I think . . . I would say, “Thank you, Michelle. . . .” It was because there was a pause, there was a thoughtfulness about, “How will Karen receive what I’m about ready to say?” If I would have said, “Your picture is objectifying. It is suggestive.” She would have gone, “Dad, what are you talking about? That wasn’t my intention.” You know, it would have been about her intention. And here I was saying, “You have so many beautiful pictures there, and this one is not my favorite.” And what does she pick? She picks a picture that’s one of my favorites. And so I’d say that kind of defined for me, like, okay, you know, we are good. And we can approach something delicate and I just need to be thoughtful about how I do that.

Craig’s moderated communication with his daughter reflected a general softening on the part of fathers. Shawn talked about his effort to more “softly move toward” his daughter and his wife. Likewise, Chris indicated that he has employed a “much softer approach” in relating to his

daughter. Kevin shared a similar change and explained that it was rooted in his growing awareness of how his masculine strength could impact the women in his family:

I think you need to be real careful, at whatever age, to respect or value their decisions. I mean males in general have a condescending, overpowering [approach]. It's like holding a coffee cup and a teacup. You slam those two together, the coffee cup is going to always remain. And you've got to always remember, with [daughters] and your wife that you can't continue to . . . you've just got to be sensitive to that.

This increase in relational awareness—reflected in a softened tone and a more deliberate approach to communication—enabled fathers to be more open and more vulnerable. The personal growth—described as a deepening of the self—that made this change possible is explored in the next section.

***Subtheme two: Deepening of the self.*** Nine of the participants provided data to support this subtheme. Fathers' ability to moderate their relational approach both reflected and fed a more introspective change process. While this process of deeper personal change was elusive at times, it came through in participants' descriptions of their increased emotional availability, relational vulnerability, and deepened faith. As fathers learned about their daughters' emotional needs, they tended to develop their emotional understanding of themselves. Chris explained that through fathering his daughter, Cate, he “got to be more appreciative of that feeling side . . . the other side of the ball.” When asked about how fathering daughters has changed him, Dean said, “I had to become less selfish being a father to a daughter. It's now time to give to your spouse and children. Give them your time, your emotional presence, your ear. Hear them when they are talking to you.”

Craig and Shawn spoke to the experience of becoming more vulnerable in their relationships. For Craig, the experience of vulnerability in The Abba Project played a big part in his discovery of its value:

Being in The Abba Project and then doing a lot of reading . . . things like Brené Brown on vulnerability . . . it's almost like you are sort of picking at a dam [of emotion]. And then you realize that it's safe and that there are other people [experiencing the same thing].

Shawn's struggles with being vulnerable were rooted in difficult childhood experiences. As can be seen in his narrative, fathering a daughter enabled tremendous growth in this area:

I shared with you some of the childhood issues and things that I went through, where oftentimes I would be ridiculed for how I did something. And I didn't want to go to my mom or the person she ended up marrying that was around for a while that would try to be the disciplinarian for me. There was never a connection. And oftentimes I would be made fun of, so I would never show vulnerability. It just never paid. And so I had to get over that. And I had to do some work on myself [from saying], "I don't want my kids to think I'm weak," or "I don't want to give up something of this power or authority in the house." But I also realized that the more I did that with my kids, the more they did it with me. It was really this counterintuitive to what I thought. But it took me a while to get there . . . even being able to cry in front of my daughter about something.

The experience of powerlessness in the face of mounting challenges led some fathers to rely more heavily on faith as a source of support. This seemed especially to be the case when daughters' choices and behaviors put them at risk for serious harm. David found himself

increasingly reliant on prayer during the time when his daughter was undergoing treatment at a residential facility:

It's really sad, because you can't run your kid's life. You don't want your kids, at the same time, to make these mistakes. But a lot of times they just have to fall on their face, and hopefully the pieces get picked back up. Obviously there is a tremendous amount of praying along the way.

Faith also deepened as men connected spiritually through shared participation in The Abba Project. Chris related his regular practice of taking initiative to reach out to other fathers with prayerful support:

I'm a very prayerful person, you know, like in a religious or spiritual aspect. There were often times where I would kind of meet with a guy one-on-one at the end [of a group session] and say, "I heard you share this. I would just like to pray for this."

A final experience that Ben related serves to encapsulate the many ways that participants grew through the experience of fathering a daughter. The experience was so remarkable that it left Ben wondering if he had encountered an angel:

It was really funny, in the middle of all this, I was somewhere in a store. And I kind of . . . and I don't remember what I said to this woman in the store. I said something like, "Yeah, I got a 17-year-old daughter," or whatever. And I kind of laughed. And she said, she looked right at me, I'll never forget this, and she said, "Girls make you a better man." Just like, "Okay, God. Did you just send this person here?" You know, like Hebrews or something, the whole "angels among us" thing. Yeah, and just like that, boom—it hit me. And she was right. I mean, women, girls make you think way more about what you say, about what you do, about how you interact, about how you tried.

Because I tried to get to their emotions . . . to have relationships with them. You have to do a lot of things that don't make sense to you. And you have to figure it out. And now, I know that I am a better person because of having a daughter.

Participants' personal growth led them to reexamine the ways that they invested their time and attention. This process of self-examination frequently prompted them to redirect their energies in accordance with their shifting priorities.

**Primary theme two: Shifting of priorities.** A second theme of personal growth in the participants was a shifting of priorities ( $n = 9$ ). On the whole, this group of fathers was an accomplished group, achieving significant success in a wide range of demanding professions. This success belied a personal drive that was, in many cases, increasingly directed toward the family. Chris, a highly successful man by many standards, was confronted about his investment at home during a conversation with his wife:

My wife asks me this question; she says, "I know you wouldn't be able to do what you do at work and be so successful in some ways, or break records or do this . . . but why the challenge at home, with that aspect of having a daughter?"

This conversation, combined with a range of other experiences, prompted Chris to direct more of his abilities toward the needs of those in his home. His situation highlights the turmoil that many fathers experience in seeking to balance their role as a provider with the need to be present for and available to their families. Although fathers in this study maintained a high regard for material provision as an expression of paternal care, many of them developed an expanded view of their fathering role.

Early on, James struggled to find a balance in fulfilling the multiple demands of fathering:



Suddenly we've got this kid, and then it just amplifies. And so you're like, "Okay I have to move up the food chain to provide everything." You know, like the private preschool and private school if we want it. And moving into a bigger house, which is really hilarious, because the kids don't care. And so that was also going on at the same time where it's like, providing for my wife was one thing—you're grown-up and you're adults. But then suddenly there has to be X number of presents under the Christmas tree, and you have to have these special family moments. And so everything became, I guess, amplified in my mind about how I was going to have to show up.

Drawing from his own experience, Kevin chose to speak directly to me, and to the stage where I am with my career and my fathering:

So, dissertation—just be careful that you don't . . . that you personally aren't chasing this as self-fulfillment. . . . You and the family, with the girls, take some time, just some margin time in your career journey to make some sacrifices. Maybe don't take that open position at [a prominent university]. Maybe hang out in the hometown, you know, with your girls. I mean, it goes by fast. That's all I can say. And so be careful of your priorities. Because at the end of the day, you don't want to have any regrets that "I should've spend more time with the girls." Especially you knowing the importance of it.

Although Kevin spoke here of the role of sacrifice in reordering career priorities, he elsewhere described the need for sacrifice in areas of recreational and relational pursuits:

You have this human being that has needs. And you have to set aside your own personal goals of lowering your handicap or poker night with the guys, or whatever it is, to focus on what really matters, and that is this kid that you brought into the world that you have limited time with.

Shawn also shared thoughts about sacrificing personal interests for the good of his daughter. As his narrative makes clear, he felt more than compensated for his sacrifice by the reward he received from being present and involved:

There is certainly a lot more sacrifice. I like to do my guy trips, my golf weekends, my sports, my . . . whatever else it's going to be. And sometimes you can't always do that. But I think we've been able to manage that in a healthy way. So sometimes I've got to say no to my things for the betterment of the family and the kids. But at the end of the day, that's okay. I've got it pretty good. . . . Some of that sacrifice, and certainly with a daughter . . . you know, there were days when I didn't want to drive across town to a dance competition [laughing] to sit there and be pretty bored with the other dads. But you know what, she'd see me in the audience, or we'd celebrate her trophy together, or I'd bring her some flowers for her show, or we'd go to dinner, or grab dessert afterwards, and that was great. That kind of beat anything that I would've been doing otherwise. So there was certainly sacrifice, but I don't know if I'd even call it sacrifice when you're seeing the kind of relationship that continues to get built.

This section presented findings related to the fifth research question: How would these fathers say that they have changed as a result of this experience, if at all? Participants described personal changes in their relational approach that accompanied a general deepening of the self, facilitated by the experience of relating to a daughter. Additionally, participants emphasized a shifting of priorities from professional accomplishments toward a greater emphasis on being successful in the home. Participants' narratives demonstrated the many ways that they grew to appreciate a fuller expression of their fathering role. While they continued to place a high value on their ability to provide for the family's material needs, they increasingly recognized the

importance of also providing for the relational and emotional needs of their children. Doing this required both deliberate effort and personal sacrifice. Table 4.8 provides a summary of primary themes and subthemes that were reviewed in this section. The last research question asked fathers to share recommendations and advice with other fathers of adolescent daughters. Findings related to this question are reviewed in the section that follows.

Table 4.8  
*How fathers have changed as a result of their experience*

Theme	# Participants Supporting Theme	Brief Description
Change as people	10	Personal growth associated with fathering an adolescent daughter and participation in the group
Relational approach	9	Intentional changes that were experienced in and impactful on relationships
Deepening of the self	9	Emotional growth Challenges in the relationship result in self-searching Deeper reliance on personal faith as a resource
Shifting of priorities	10	Recognizing the relationship as a priority reorients personal decisions and commitments Expanded definition of personal success

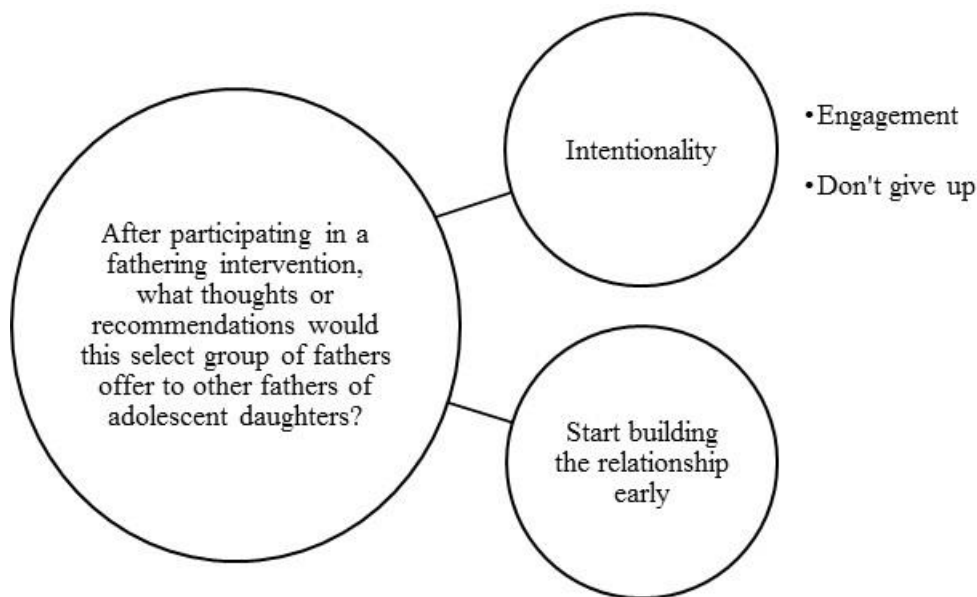
### **Research Question Six: Findings (Themes) Related to Recommendations for Other Fathers**

The final research question asked participants to provide advice or information to other fathers of adolescent daughters: After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters? This question served as a way to consolidate participants' learning by prompting them to identify key areas of personal insight and offer suggestions for how these insights could

be applied. Two themes and two subthemes were identified in the data and are presented in Figure 4.6.

Because I sought to build rapport with the co-researchers by sharing about my personal and professional background (previous clinical work with children and families and being the father to three young daughters), many of the fathers focused their reflections on this question directly at me. While this was not solicited, it did serve to provide the participants with a very practical point of reference for their thoughtful recommendations. Whether their advice was offered directly to me or to fathers in general, participants provided data that supported the major themes of *intentionality* and *starting to build the relationship early*. These primary themes and two subthemes will be explored in the sections that follow.

**Figure 4.6.** Research Question Six Primary Themes and Subthemes



*Figure 4.6.* Research Question Six: After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations does this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters?

**Primary theme one: Intentionality.** Fathers used a variety of words to reference the theme of intentionality ( $n = 10$ ). Most prominently, they chose words like: *intentional*, *engagement*, *deliberate*, and *pursuit*. Each of these words carries a sense of purposeful investment in a relationship of deep personal concern. This emphasis called to mind the earlier theme of a shifting of priorities, which emerged from Research Question Five. By reinforcing the importance of fathers' involvement in daughters' lives, participants demonstrated the high view they took toward fatherhood as both a responsibility and a calling. Their specific thoughts on how this calling could be fulfilled are examined in the review of the subtheme *engagement*.

**Subtheme one: Engagement.** Fathers encouraged intentional behavior in areas of relational investment, learning about fathering, and learning about the distinct needs and characteristics of each child ( $n = 9$ ). Brad spoke to the first and third of these areas in his advice to other fathers:

Be intentional with your engagement in your daughters' lives. Give them all the time you can and then make a little more. There is nothing more important than establishing and maintaining open communications with your children. As men it is so easy for us to shut out and compartmentalize parts of our lives. Be explicit in [your] efforts to know [your] daughter.

Gary also mentioned the need to learn about his daughter, Julia, and spoke of the value that The Abba Project brought to this effort. An extended quote of his reflections on what advice he would give to other fathers of daughters helps to flesh out some of the areas he found most important in fathering Julia:

Once again, starting with communication. And I think learning about your daughter at various stages as she is growing up. What are those things that are important to her? The

[issue of] self-esteem: I had never really given it much thought until we had that long discussion on teenage self-esteem and some of the detrimental effects that that can have. And getting to suicide as an example. Really learning . . . anything, even if you don't want to try to get in the next Abba session, at least learn a little bit about that. Even before the class, I had been reading a number of books since [Julia] was born about dads and daughters. I just wanted to make sure that I can do everything that I can, and that I know as much as that I can. And I'm still going to make mistakes, but hopefully mitigate some of that. . . . But I think those key stages in the growth of a young girl through adolescence to a young woman, those stages of development are so key. And it's great for what I call "situational awareness," where we are aware and we're in tune as much as we can be with some of the changes that they're going through emotionally, physically, spiritually, and lots of places.

James shared about the need to put his intentional pursuit of his daughter, Anna, into both words and actions and encouraged other fathers to do the same:

I would just say, make it a priority and be vocal about it. Be intentional about the relationship and tell your daughter, because then there's accountability. There's power in words. When you say, "You know, Anna, I'd love to sleep in on Saturday, but I'm going to get up early and we're going to go to breakfast, because you matter." Even if that was it, if that was all that they did. If they say, "Hey, we're going to go to this place that we go for breakfast." I never go there with my son. That's Anna's and my place, and she knows that. And so I think that even just that act of saying, "You get something that nobody else gets." Whether it is my time, my attention, a special location, or a seven-dollar croissant. Whatever it is, they're going to lock it away.

A number of participants, like Gary who was quoted above, were quick to suggest that other fathers seek out support from a group like The Abba Project. David was a strong advocate for the group, as can be seen by his endorsement and numerous referrals:

I would just encourage, and I have encouraged actually, a handful of my friends [to join the group]. My brother-in-law went through the project after I did it, and I think he found great value in it also. You need to be connected. Grab one of Michelle's books. Go through the project. It is that intentional investment of time with your daughter that will end up paying dividends beyond your wildest expectations.

Ben's experience prompted him to offer a similar recommendation:

I think something like Michelle's group is critical to all dads. I really do. And I think that men need to arm themselves with information, and not just assume that everything's going to be hunky-dory. Because there are so many inroads that you can make with your daughter.

Despite their best efforts, fathers recognized that there were barriers to deliberate investment in the father-daughter relationship. At times, the barriers made them want to give up on the relationship.

***Subtheme two: Don't give up.*** Given the value these fathers placed on intentional engagement with their daughters, it was surprising to see that many of them also described a tendency to retreat from or give up on the relationship ( $n = 7$ ). In acknowledging their own impulse toward withdrawal, participants advised other fathers to stay involved and to find ways to work through difficult seasons in the relationship with their daughter. Ben's heartfelt statement about the tendency to give up reflects his own frustrations with fathering an adolescent daughter:

I really see how men just choose to disengage, because they feel so impotent and so unable to understand or have a part in what's happening right in front of them with their own daughter, that they just don't . . . they just choose to not engage.

Shawn mentioned a statement on men's tendency to retreat from relational challenges that was shared during the group: "Michelle has a saying that is so true and I think she says it pretty early: 'Guys would rather do nothing than take the chance of doing it wrong.' And I really could relate to that."

Caleb seemed to be referencing this same statement when he shared about the need to not give up on the relationship:

Michelle touched on it, that maybe some guys were more worried about screwing it up, and if I don't even try it then at least I won't fail at doing it, where I would maybe say the same thing. I had no experience doing it, so maybe I just won't do it. Then I won't screw it up.

Speaking about the need to avoid quitting on the relationship, Kevin sought to prepare other fathers for the difficulties that may come with daughters' entrance into adolescence. His statement on this demonstrates his long-term perspective on the relationship—something that can be helpful in weathering the storms that are likely to come:

Well, before that stage [adolescence], I would say, "Rough waters are coming, but continue to keep rowing the boat. And don't give up, because there will be points where you're going to want to just pitch the oars and give up [laughter]." And I really think the finish line is more like [age] 23. And so don't blur the finish line based on what society tells you, or what you think, because that is absolutely not true.



Caleb referred to the game of baseball in describing the need for engagement and persistence in the fathering role:

What [a personal counselor] said is: “Your kids don’t want perfect parents. They just want you to try.” And if you are at least giving an effort, it doesn’t have to be perfect, but they can at least see you’re trying. And even if you do fail, you went down swinging, versus not even . . . I guess using the baseball metaphor: You don’t even step into the batter’s box versus going down swinging. At least you tried.

Because many of the fathers wrestled with their own impulses toward withdrawal from a relationship that they valued, they were able to speak in an honest way about the need to overcome these impulses. Participants recognized the father-daughter relationship as a lifelong bond. They saw it as something worthy of significant investment and ongoing cultivation. While participants viewed these efforts as being important during daughters’ adolescence and early adulthood, they saw childhood as the best time to begin building the relationship.

**Primary theme two: Start building the relationship early.** Nine fathers provided advice that supported the need to begin building the father-daughter connection during childhood. Participants saw early investment in the relationship as a way to strengthen a bond that would be essential in buffering the challenges that daughters might experience in adolescence. Participants communicated that a strong bond increased the access and the influence that fathers had with their adolescent daughters. Narratives that related to this theme tended to take the form of direct advice and personal regrets.

With regard to advice, Brad simply stated, “Start early!” Chris expanded on this:

Don’t underestimate how quickly influences in the world can affect the relationship with your daughter or her outlook on life. There are always ways to change [as a father] and

improve upon the father-daughter relationship. There are no simple answers. Take the time to invest up front. Also take the time to ask deeper questions and meditate on the responses.

Caleb shared similar thoughts in his advice to other fathers:

I'd say start early. Start early. I guess it's never too late, but it's a lot easier if you make it a practice being with them early. . . . Doing the dates, whether it's early elementary school, then it's not as awkward trying to start it in the seventh grade or middle school when they're already trying to push away.

The continuity of the father-daughter relationship was important to Shawn, as can be seen in his recommendations for fathers who might be uncertain about when to start investing in this relationship:

You need to start setting expectations, and ideas, and rules early. If you think it's too early when they're 5 or 6, then when is the right age? 8? 9? 10? I would say, start traditions early, whatever it's going to be. If it is that weekly ice cream cone, or if it is letting her pick the restaurant when she's 6. Because it's going to be different when she is 16. She will always remember that.

Ben's statement on the importance of starting early reflects both advice and personal regret:

Men could learn that there's value in connecting and learning things before their daughters [enter adolescence], because they're vulnerable, you know. And there's so much to be learned and had. And I regret the relationship that I had with Melissa. I'd like to have those years back. I don't know if I think it would be a whole lot different,

but I would have been more confident. And I wish I could have kept her from some of the things she had to endure because she was kind of off-kilter.

David also expressed some regrets as he thought about how a closer relationship with his daughter Rachel might have changed some of the dating decisions she made during early adolescence:

If I could have known [about the importance of early relational investment] in middle school, not that it would have been a bed of roses, but it may have helped [my daughters] knowing that their dad had a personal connection. By building that relationship with Rachel, then maybe she wouldn't look for something outside of that.

It is evident that the participants' endorsement of the need to make early investments in the father-daughter relationship was often rooted in their own difficult experiences. In a sense, they were seeking to protect other fathers from some of the hard learning that they themselves endured. Although participation in The Abba Project was seen as a critical step in building or rebuilding a relationship with their daughter, participants recognized that early investment might have mitigated some of the challenges that they later experienced. Craig referred to this as "preventative care" and contrasted it with the tendency to only seek out help once serious symptoms have developed. He colorfully described this as "hitting the gym after the heart attack." Participants in this study were consistent in advising other fathers about how they could avoid this fate.

This final section presented findings related to the sixth research question: After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters? Participants urged other fathers to become more intentional about their fathering. This included an emphasis on engaging with

daughters and persisting with pursuit of the relationship even when encountering difficulties. They also emphasized the importance of early engagement with daughters as a way to build a foundation for adolescent and adult relationships. A summary of primary themes and subthemes for Research Question Six is provided in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

*Recommendations for Other Fathers of Adolescent Daughters*

<b>Theme</b>	<b># Participants Supporting Theme</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Intentionality	10	Being deliberate about fathering Pursuing children and learning about their needs
Engagement	9	Affirming the importance of keeping connected to daughter in and through adolescence
Don't give up	7	Resisting the tendency to withdraw when things get difficult
Start building the relationship early	9	Establish intentional investment in the relationship from the start Lay a foundation for the challenges that may come with adolescence

**Summary**

This chapter presented demographic information and findings from this heuristic study of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship. To provide background on the 11 men who participated in The Abba Project and in this study, this chapter included an extended review of collective and individual demographic information. The remainder of the chapter focused on explicating the primary themes and subthemes that emerged from interaction with the participants around the six research questions that this study explored. Tracing the structure that the research questions provided, participants supplied data that followed a defined arc. That arc

and the presentation of findings progressed through the following areas: fathers' initial experiences with fathering a daughter and changes that were seen in the relationship once daughters entered adolescence, barriers that were experienced and overcome as fathers sought out support for this relationship, experiences with a fathering intervention, relational changes that resulted from participation in the intervention, personal changes that were associated with the experience of fathering a daughter, and recommendations for other fathers of adolescent daughters. The final chapter provides an opportunity for reflection on the results and implications of these findings. Limitations of this study and areas for future research are also presented.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study explored the experiences of 11 fathers of adolescent daughters who made a decision to participate in a fathering intervention. This study asked the participating fathers these six research questions:

1. What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter?
  - a. How do they see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?
2. How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking?
3. How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention?
4. How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group?
5. How would they say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?
6. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters?

Participants related information about their experiences with fathering an adolescent daughter and with the fathering intervention through personal journals, hour-long interviews, and ongoing correspondence with the researcher. Because a qualitative heuristic approach was selected for this study, the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1990) were followed in interacting with, processing, and explicating the findings. Chapter Four provided a comprehensive presentation of those findings.

This chapter presents an opportunity for discussion of the study's findings by considering how the findings can be applied to the existing literature on fathering, father/adolescent-daughter relations, and therapeutic engagement with fathers. The implications of these findings are numerous and will be explicated in terms of their implications for social change and concrete action. This will be followed by a consideration of the study's limitations and recommendations for further research. The personal nature of this research project led to the decision to employ a qualitative heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990). I briefly explore my experience with conducting the research and discuss the personal impact that it had on me. The chapter concludes with a final summary of this research project as a whole.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Because the research questions tracked a progression in the literature on fathering an adolescent daughter—moving from the general experience to relational strain and eventual involvement with supportive services—they serve as a useful framework for evaluating findings in light of existing literature. The following sections explore ways that the findings are informed by and can inform the extant body of literature on fatherhood, the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, and therapeutic engagement with fathers. Findings are organized by research question and explore the relationship between existing literature and notable themes that were identified by this study. Where relevant, the conceptual framework of generative fathering is revisited in order to explore how the present findings both support and enhance this fathering framework.

### **Research Question One**

What personal meaning or significance does this select group of fathers associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter? How do they see adolescence as different from

earlier stages in the relationship? The first research question generated three primary themes: *continuity and change*, *emergent otherness*, and *each child is unique*. Primary theme *continuity and change* included the two subthemes of *changes associated with adolescence* and *shifting roles*. The second primary theme, *emergent otherness*, included subthemes *puberty* and *romantic relationships*. Each of these areas is examined in light of existing research.

Participants emphasized their daughters' adolescence as a time of both continuity and change. This was consistent with qualitative research by Proulx and Helms (2008), earlier reported in Chapter Two, which saw adolescence as a time when enduring emotional bonds were maintained even as parents and adolescents negotiated and renegotiated their shifting roles. This shifting of roles was a challenge for some fathers. Fathers maintained a desire to protect and support their daughter(s), but found this increasingly difficult to do as their daughter(s) gained independence and gravitated toward peer relationships. Romantic relationships seemed to require a special adjustment by fathers. Reflecting earlier findings by Wright (2009) and Flaake (2005), some fathers were hesitant to discuss topics related to dating and sexuality with their daughters.

Participants identified learning about the importance of their role as gender role models for their daughters as a motivator for more intentional involvement and more deliberate demonstrations of appropriate male behavior. These initiatives are supported by research on the father-daughter relationship in that open and close relationships between this dyad are associated with daughters showing greater security, confidence, and comfort in their relationships with males (Dalton et al., 2006; Flouri, 2005; Kast, 1997; Leonard, 1998; Scharf & Mayseless, 2008).

Fathers experienced mixed feelings about their daughters' entrance into puberty, as well as their movement toward romantic attachments. Although the initial reaction to bodily changes



associated with daughters' pubertal development caused some fathers to pull back (Flaake, 2005), learning about their daughters need for affirmation and involvement at this stage (Hutchinson & Cedarbaum, 2011; Way & Gillman, 2000) tended to increase intentional involvement, open communication, and more affectionate displays. Consistent with the literature on daughters' sexual socialization, mothers remained the primary point of contact for daughters as they navigated bodily and hormonal changes associated with puberty (Flaake, 2005; Marino et al., 2013).

One finding associated with this research question was somewhat novel, and although it might seem obvious, it was not readily identified in the literature on father/adolescent-daughter relations. This finding had to do with the assertion by all study participants of the uniqueness of each father-child dyad. In affirming each child as unique, fathers noted the importance of learning about, or "going to school" on their individual children. Like other fathers, Shawn asserted that this discovery was essential to him learning to provide his daughter, Sophia, with effective support. Although individual uniqueness of children reduced fathers' ability to employ a one-size-fits-all approach, it also contributed to the richness of their fathering experience. As will be seen in the review of Research Question Five, this enriching experience, though challenging at times, was a significant contributor to the personal growth and development of fathers.

### **Research Question Two**

How does this select group of fathers describe the ways in which they overcame barriers to help seeking? Two primary themes were identified for this research area. The first, *identified barriers*, yielded subthemes of *time and commitment*, and *discomfort or uncertainty about the*

group. The second primary theme, *overcoming barriers*, included the subthemes of *desperation* and *prior connection*.

Research on family services consistently shows that fathers typically are not actively sought out for inclusion (Duhig et al., 2002; Fabiano, 2007). As an intervention that is exclusively focused on fathering an adolescent daughter, The Abba Project overcame this barrier by affirming and prioritizing fathers from the outset. Rather than augmenting children's treatment—the typical approach to family involvement and one where fathers are largely neglected (Rojas et al., 2006)—The Abba Project strove to promote men's engagement with their daughters even when these daughters were not clinically involved. For this reason, the conception and design of The Abba Project mitigated many of the inhibiting barriers identified in the literature on fathers' participation in services for children. Despite this notable strength of the intervention, participants in this study did identify two distinct barriers to participation in the intervention. Both of these barriers are supported by the literature.

A number of fathers described work obligations as limiting their availability for participation in The Abba Project. Hofferth et al. (2013) identified employment and work obligations as significant barriers to men's participation in family services. Power, Eiraldi, Clarke, Mazzuca, & Krain (2005) suggested that services to fathers be scheduled in a flexible manner that accommodates their work schedules. Numerous participants in this study credited the one-evening-a-month format of The Abba Project as enabling their participation. Describing the time commitment involved with the group, Shawn commented, "For my schedule, I could do that." The accommodating format of The Abba Project was identified as a strength and serves as a model for other services that seek to promote paternal participation and engagement.

Participants described a second and more personal barrier in their uncertainty about what the group would involve. Walters, Tasker, and Bichard (2001) found that men may be apprehensive about what is expected of them in a clinical setting. Walters et al. noted that a primary apprehension had to do with men's fear about emotional exposure and worry that their masculinity might be attacked or otherwise diminished by family service providers. This finding was supported by the accounts of study participants. Caleb described his reluctance about joining the group as being rooted in not seeing himself as a "touchy feely" guy—something he assumed would be a requirement for participation. Similarly, Ben was uncertain about what it might look like to show emotion in a group setting. For many fathers, these fears were allayed by their pre-group interviews with Dr. Watson. In these interviews, Dr. Watson addressed specific apprehensions and provided clarity about the content of the group and expectations for participation. Prior acquaintance with Dr. Watson or friendship with other fathers who previously participated in The Abba Project served to dispel the uncertainty that some fathers experienced.

One final barrier identified in the literature was not a central focus of the participants' data but bears mention. Berlyn et al. (2008) found that men may be turned off by the ways in which family services are marketed and promoted. In order to make these services more appealing to men, Berlyn and colleagues suggest that they be marketed directly to fathers in a way that emphasizes the active nature of the service and affirms the important role that fathers play in their children's development. The Abba Project conforms with this recommendation in that its very premise is an affirmation of the essential role that fathers play in the development and well-being of their daughters. The group utilizes a variety of marketing approaches, including word-of-mouth and community-based awareness campaigns. As an example of this,

Gary learned about and eventually came to participate in The Abba Project after seeing it featured on a television program that coincided with Father's Day.

Desperation was a prominent theme in fathers' accounts of how they overcame barriers to participation in The Abba Project. Whether this desperation came from distress related to daughters' personal challenges or a breakdown in the relationship, it was frequently associated with fathers' affirmation of love for the daughter(s). Cosson and Graham (2012) identified "love for daughters" and a desire to "be a good father" (p. 125) as significant motivators for men's participation in family services. Ben's statement about his strained relationship with his adolescent daughter Melissa demonstrates this coupling of desperation and love: "I just had to connect with her, because I love her." Like other fathers, Ben was motivated to participate in an intervention by a combination of love and desperation. This positive orientation toward the fathering role is reflective of the father-affirming ethic proposed by the generative fathering framework and will be explored separately in a later section of this interpretation of findings. The next section will examine how participants' experiences with the intervention relate to existing research on fathering services.

### **Research Question Three**

How does this select group of fathers describe their experience of participating in a fathering intervention? This question generated two primary themes which focused on different aspects of the group experience. The first, *experiences within the group*, included subthemes of *vicarious learning* and *brotherhood*. The second primary theme was *experiences outside of the group*.

Because the majority of research on fathers' participation in family services is focused on increasing and improving parental involvement with children, the research tends to focus on

either family therapy or on generalized parenting education (Phares, Rojas, Thurston, & Hankinson, 2010). Specific research on father-only groups is lacking (Phares et al., 2010). Studies by Berlyn et al. (2008) and Frank et al. (2014) suggest that fathers may be most comfortable receiving group services in the company of other fathers. Shawn endorsed this sentiment: “I think it’s very true that had I been surrounded by 11 women and one dad, versus 11 other guys . . . I don’t know that I would have opened up nearly so much in my sessions of The Abba Project.”

Participation in a fathers-only group enabled participants to gain a sense of brotherhood as they collectively worked to improve a relationship that all valued. The group’s composition also allowed for concentration on fathering as opposed to generalized parenting behaviors. In presenting a review of behavioral parent training, Fabiano (2007) emphasized the need to ensure that session content is relevant to fathers as well as mothers. The Abba Project’s fathers-only format ensured that the specific needs of fathers were addressed by the group’s content. By focusing on issues that were particular to the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, the group also provided participants with valuable opportunities for vicarious learning. Fathers related that The Abba Project enabled them to learn from both the positive and negative experiences of their peers. Vicarious learning has been recognized as a primary therapeutic factor in the group experience (MacKenzie, 1987), and according to Yalom and Leszcz (2005), it is a major advantage of this service delivery format.

Participants in The Abba Project placed a high value on between-session assignments, particularly noting the benefit of structured dates with their daughters. A meta-analysis ( $n = 46$  studies) of homework effects in cognitive and behavioral therapy by Kazantzis, Whittington, and Dattilio (2010) found programs that included homework were significantly more effective than

those that did not (enhanced effect size:  $d = 0.48$ ). In order for homework to be effective, it obviously must be completed. Numerous fathers indicated that The Abba Project provided a measure of accountability that helped to ensure their completion of between-session assignments. Group sessions and between-group assignments were instrumental to facilitating the changes that fathers experienced in their relationships with their adolescent daughters. This topic was the focus of the fourth research question.

#### **Research Question Four**

How does this select group of fathers describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in their relationships with their adolescent daughters during and after participation in a fathering group? Four primary themes and three subthemes were identified for this research question. Primary themes included: *change was complex and multi-determined, the act of “moving toward,” insight and awareness, and new skills and tools*. The primary theme of *insight and awareness* included subthemes of *increased awareness of own role and importance* and *female adolescent world*, and the primary theme of *new skills and tools* included a subtheme of *communication*.

On the whole, participants in this study experienced significant improvement in their relationships with their daughters following participation in The Abba Project. They attributed these changes to a variety of factors but consistently mentioned the value that the intervention had in increasing insight and improving skills that were important to fathering a daughter. Some fathers, like Kevin and David, saw the group as one of many factors that led to improved relations with their daughters. Both of these fathers have seen relations with their daughters improve as their daughters have progressed through more tumultuous stages of adolescence. This experience was consistent with research by De Goede et al. (2009) that saw early and

middle adolescence (ages 11-16) as peak times for parent-child conflict. Although power struggles and increasing withdrawal characterized early and middle adolescence, late adolescence (17-19) was frequently a time of rapprochement and stabilizing relations. Mirroring the adolescent tendency toward withdrawal (De Goede et al., 2009), Proulx and Helms (2008) noted a trend among parents—more pronounced for fathers than mothers—of pulling back from engagement during more conflictual stages of children's adolescence. Van Doorn et al. (2011) found that fathers may maintain more consistent involvement with their sons than their daughters as they progress through adolescence. This trend seemed to be reflected in participants' affirmation of a need to deliberately move toward, or pursue, their daughters. The tendency toward withdrawal and the need for engagement will be considered more closely under the review of Research Question Six.

Fathers indicated that the decision to pursue their daughters was influenced by their growing awareness of their importance and by the acquisition of insight into their daughters' female adolescent world. The literature review in Chapter Two extensively covered information on fathers' importance to daughters and on the daughters' adolescent experience. Dr. Watson, the group's founder, has been deliberate about providing accurate and up-to-date scientific information on the father/adolescent-daughter relationship. For the fathers who participated in The Abba Project and in this study, encountering this information served to both reorient and direct behavior. Fathers reported that new insights increased their understanding of the critical role they played in bringing support and stability to their daughters' development. Daughters' self-esteem and body image were frequently mentioned as important areas of learning for fathers. Both of these are areas where fathers are found to play a significant role in daughters' development (Elliot, 2010; Mori, 1999; Scheffler & Nauss, 1999).

For participants, new awareness went hand-in-hand with the acquisition of new skills and tools. Fabiano (2007) cautions about approaching men with information about fathering skills—warning that it can turn men off if it is done in a way that emphasizes current deficiency. Fathers in The Abba Project did not seem to receive the skills training provided during the intervention in this way. Rather, they took it as an opportunity to add new tools to their existing fathering repertoire. Communication, the tool most consistently mentioned by fathers as being important to connecting with their daughters, finds robust support in the literature on father-daughter relationships. Participants described their efforts to become more positive, engaged, and creative in communicating with their daughters. They also mentioned that they became more active and deliberate listeners.

These changes in communication are supported by research by Punyanunt-Carter (2006), who used communication motive theory to explore the attachment between fathers and daughters. Fathers in this study moved from using primarily instrumental communication (focused on conflict management, shared tasks, and advice) to greater use of the expressive communication style (involving assurances and positivity) that Punyanunt-Carter found to be preferred by daughters. This shift in communication style may lead to greater relational synchrony—something that Lundy (2002) found to be associated with stronger father-child attachment. Chris provided a powerful example of this change in communication patterns by describing his deliberate effort to give less advice and more encouragement to his daughter, Cate. Cate responded to this change by becoming more open and initiating communication with her father more quickly.

Nielsen (2007) drew from 15 years of research on undergraduate women to assert that communication with fathers is a primary area of frustration for adolescent and young adult



women. According to Nielsen, 80% of daughters in her studies reported a desire to communicate better with their fathers. Specifically, these daughters wanted communication that was more mutual, more open, and more self-revealing. This is another area where fathers, including Chris, made deliberate changes. Chris explained that Cate seemed to really open up when he shared more about himself: “I started to share about my background and stuff, and she was really curious about a lot of it.”

Participants made an additional change in their communication with their daughters that is borne out by the literature: They made a deliberate effort to become less reactive and less judgmental. Shawn described his efforts to become more calm and approachable when his children brought up difficult topics. Matthews et al. (2006) found that daughters may avoid communicating with their fathers out of fear that fathers might be critical or disapproving. Similarly, Miller and Lee (2001) indicated that daughters may resist talking with their fathers about issues of sexuality, poor school performance, irresponsible behavior, or issues that could be perceived as disrespectful toward family members. By moderating their natural impulses toward reactivity—something that seemed to flow from a protective instinct—participants found that they gained increased access to their daughters’ experience and could therefore serve as a more effective resource to them.

As participants became increasingly aware of the importance of their role and more deliberate in the ways they engaged with their daughters, they saw relations improve significantly. New insights and new tools combined to produce new behaviors and the trajectory of these father/adolescent-daughter relationships shifted in dramatic ways. It was clear that participation in The Abba Project was an influential experience for the co-researchers. Because most fathers do not have access to an intervention of this kind, it will be important to consider

ways that other groups of fathers—particularly those who are less proactive and less prepared for engagement with their adolescent daughters—can be equipped for success in this essential but challenging stage in the relationship.

### **Research Question Five**

How would fathers who participated in this study say that they have changed as a result of the experience, if at all? This question generated two primary themes and two subthemes. Primary theme one, *change as people*, included the subthemes *relational approach* and *deepening of the self*. The second primary theme, *shifting of priorities*, did not include any subthemes. This research question generated a wealth of information that broadly supported the generative fathering framework (Dollahite et al., 1997).

To review, the generative fathering framework asserts that men are both capable and desirous of responding to their children's needs in flexible and consistent ways (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998). Furthermore this conceptual ethic affirms that men develop as people through investment in their fathering role. Participants in this study endorsed this premise by sharing about the many ways that they have changed as a result of fathering an adolescent daughter. Notably, participants shared about becoming softer and more intentional with their relational approach. Although this change was initiated by engagement with daughters, it tended to become generalized to other relationships, particularly to relationships with other women and girls. Numerous fathers indicated that they have grown in relationship with their wives as they have learned to relate better to their daughters.

The original formulation of the generative fathering framework did not speculate about how men might develop differentially from fathering a son versus fathering a daughter, but this study provides some indication that these different fathering experiences promote men's

development in distinct ways. Ben, for instance, operated in a fairly intuitive manner as he raised his three older sons, but he was challenged into new areas of emotional growth by the experience of fathering his adolescent daughter, Melissa. This potential area of investigation will be revisited in the section on recommendations for further study.

Along with changes in their relational approach, participants indicated that a general deepening of self coincided with their experience of fathering an adolescent daughter. This was particularly the case for fathers who encountered difficulty in the relationship or witnessed challenges in their daughters' development. Personal faith became an important resource for some fathers during times of distress as they grappled with a feeling of powerlessness and lack of control over a relationship that was so personally important. For many fathers, these times of struggle became times of growth. Dollahite and Hawkins (1998) contend that "most men know or learn that good fathering is something necessary to their growth and happiness" (p. 10). Although it did not always yield immediate benefits to the father-daughter relationship, fathers' intentional reorientation toward their daughter(s) can be understood as a generative act. Dollahite and Hawkins define generativity as "the process of expanding one's concern beyond the self and the intimate dyad to include one's children and the next generation" (p. 9). Study participants showed many signs of this type of generativity as they became more sacrificial and more intentionally invested in the needs of their children.

A further area of personal growth was seen in fathers shifting of priorities. In general, participants understood their role as providers to be a natural expression of their fathering responsibility. This inclination is in keeping with the generative fathering conception of fatherwork, which holds that men serve their families by stewarding material resources that will promote the healthy development of their children (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998). This aspect of

stewardship, though important, is only one of the seven domains of fatherwork identified by Dollahite and Hawkins (1998). Participants experienced significant growth as they embraced the opportunity to fulfill elements of the other six domains: relationship work, development work, ethical work, spiritual work, recreational work, and mentoring work.

Although participants maintained a sense of responsibility for material provision, their renewed emphasis on direct engagement with their daughters both increased and improved their ability to conduct fatherwork in the relationship, development, ethical, spiritual, and mentoring domains. From the outset, recreational work, like stewardship work, was a fairly consistent area of investment by fathers, although many fathers gained an enhanced awareness of the impact of their presence and availability during shared family activities. Mentoring work was enhanced as fathers laid the groundwork for more egalitarian relations with their daughters. Kevin described this shift as moving from being a “coach” to a “counselor.” As participants reflected on the many ways they have grown through fathering a daughter, they were quick to offer advice to other fathers. Their specific recommendations will be presented in the next section.

### **Research Question Six**

After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would this select group of fathers offer to other fathers of adolescent daughters? The final research question yielded two primary themes and two subthemes. The first primary theme, *intentionality*, included subthemes of *engagement* and *don't give up*. Primary theme two was identified as *start building the relationship early*.

This question provided participants with an opportunity to share what they had learned about fathering an adolescent daughter. Because this advice came from fathers who participated in a fathering intervention, their recommendations provide valuable insights that may be of

benefit to other fathers and to family service providers. The first and most obvious recommendation that was offered by participants had to do with maintaining intentional investment in the father-daughter relationship. Many fathers acknowledged a tendency to withdraw from daughters during times of relational strain (Proulx & Helms, 2008). This acknowledgement was coupled with an admonition directed toward other fathers of daughters about the need to maintain active relational engagement.

Because this tendency toward withdrawal was seen even in this select group of invested fathers, it is something that bears further investigation. Withdrawal turned to engagement as fathers learned about their importance to their daughters and were equipped for more successful interaction with them. It might be assumed that fathers with fewer resources and a lesser sense of their paternal value are even more subject to this withdrawal tendency. Direct examination of the experiences of these fathers could be a valuable area for further study.

Participants suggested that fathers may be more prepared to succeed with their daughters in adolescence if they start building the relationship early. Shawn questioned whether it was ever too early to begin with this, and research on father-daughter attachment strongly supports his perspective. Intentional engagement in caregiving activities during children's infancy can promote paternal sensitivity to children's needs and synchrony of responses (Palm, 2014). Such behaviors may serve to prime fathers for lasting relationship with their children at the same time they are fostering a secure attachment in children. Secure attachment to fathers is associated with better father-daughter communication, better conflict resolution, and higher perceptions of support (Freeman & Almond, 2010; Palm, 2014; Wong et al., 2009). The study participants and the research literature agree about early paternal engagement with daughters. Both sources hold

that this engagement is important for establishing and strengthening a bond that can undergo some disruption during the predictably challenging period of adolescence.

Participants in this study provided a wealth of information about their experiences fathering an adolescent daughter and participating in an intervention that was designed to promote this relationship. Much of what they shared has direct relevance to a pressing national concern. The next section will consider the national “crisis in fathering” and will explore how the present findings might help to address this recognized need.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Because of their contribution to each new generation of children, fathers are of the utmost societal importance. Popular and scholarly sources alike identify the state of fathering in America as in crisis (Allen & Daly, 2007; Hofferth et al., 2013; Lamb, 2010; Nielsen, 2014). One statistic from the most recent national census serves to demonstrate the extent of the problem. The 2010 U.S. Census found that one in three children were living in homes where the father was not present. Although this crisis in fathering is a real one, it has all too often been covered by popular media in ways that lead to what Dollahite et al. (1997) describe as a “deficit perspective” of fathering. Such a perspective focuses on men’s failures and inadequacies rather than on their strengths. As Beckert et al. (2006) point out, this negative focus is likely to dispirit and alienate fathers rather than engage them. Unfortunately, this deficit perspective seems to carry over to the actions and attitudes of family service providers. Professionals in this field tend to passively exclude fathers by focusing their efforts almost exclusively on mothers (Bögels & Phares, 2008; Lundahl et al., 2008). Despite this tendency, there is strong evidence that children’s clinical and developmental outcomes can be improved by promoting greater paternal involvement (Bagner & Eyberg, 2003; Webster-Stratton, 1985).

Successful therapeutic engagement with fathers requires the widespread acceptance of a new paradigm—one that is both inviting of paternal involvement and honoring of men's distinct contribution to children's development. The conceptual ethic of generative fathering provides this paradigm (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998). Although it was not explicitly identified in the conception and design of The Abba Project, this intervention clearly reflects the model's essential framework through its promotion of fathers' involvement with their daughters and its implied assumption of paternal importance. Father involvement is associated with a wide variety of developmental benefits for daughters (Allen & Daly, 2007; Lamb, 2010; Nielsen, 2007; Snarey, 1993) and has been linked with improved developmental outcomes in men (Bradford & Hawkins, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002). The next section draws on this study's findings to provide a number of concrete recommendations for action.

### **Recommendations for Action**

By emphasizing both the value of fathers and barriers to paternal engagement, this study highlighted the need for more deliberate efforts to promote fathers' involvement in supportive services. The success of The Abba Project in soliciting the engagement of fathers and improving father-daughter relational outcomes suggests that it is an intervention worthy of further study and possible replication. Short of widespread duplication of The Abba Project fathering groups, a review of findings from this study may provide some clues about how other fathering services can be usefully refined and enhanced. Toward that end, these findings may prove beneficial for a number of distinct populations. Foremost among this group are other fathers of daughters, particularly fathers of adolescent or pre-adolescent daughters. Dissemination of information about paternal importance and the dramatic changes that can occur in the father-daughter

relationship can be expected to encourage other fathers of daughters toward more intentional and successful engagement.

This information should be disseminated in a variety of different formats to ensure that it reaches as wide an audience as possible. Dr. Watson developed a book, *Dad, Here's What I Really Need from You: A Guide for Connecting with Your Daughter's Heart* (2014), that provides fathers with much of the content covered in The Abba Project. As a practical and easy-to-follow guide about fathering a daughter, this book can be read in isolation or as part of an organically developed Abba fathering group. Relevant findings from this study might also be disseminated to fathers through seminars, presentations, and further scholarly writing. The emphasis on scholarship points to a second audience for the findings—namely, clinicians and family service workers. Numerous authors have indicated a need for clinicians to directly solicit the participation of fathers in children's treatment (Bagner & Eyberg, 2003; Berlyn et al., 2008; Fabiano, 2007; Rojas et al., 2006). While recruitment of fathers will be an important first step, it must be accompanied by father-affirming clinical practices. Noting the general lack of professional competency in clinical work with fathers, Fletcher and Visser (2008) called for the “development of a comprehensive framework for professional competencies in father engagement” (p. 62).

This need for the development of professional competencies points to counselor educators and clinical supervisors as a third group who might benefit from the present findings. Lazar et al. (1991) found that clinicians who were aware of paternal importance were more likely to directly promote fathers' engagement in family services. Duhig et al. (2002) suggested that the increased emphasis on evidence-based practices would naturally lead to a greater emphasis on promoting paternal involvement in services. Despite a burgeoning amount of literature on the



valuable contribution that fathers make to children's therapy and overall developmental outcomes, it is not at all clear that clinical training programs have followed this recommendation. While it might not warrant the inclusion of a stand-alone course, focused attention on paternal importance and the development of competencies for clinical work with fathers should be embedded in the curriculum of all counselor education programs.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study**

#### **Limitations**

All research studies involve decisions about methodology and design. The focus and approach of a study are shaped by the state of current research on the topic of investigation and by the specific research questions that guide it. This qualitative heuristic study sought to shed light on the experiences of help-seeking fathers of adolescent daughters by learning about how these fathers viewed their participation in a structured fathering intervention. A heuristic design was selected because it enabled me, as the researcher, to most fully engage with a topic of deep personal concern (Moustakas, 1990). The subjective nature of my judgments and interpretations of the data are recognized as a limitation to the findings. My ongoing critical dialogue with the empirical literature and my collaborative engagement with the co-researchers mitigate these limitations. They are further addressed by explicit acknowledgment of personal interest and potential bias—areas that were addressed in Chapter Three.

A second limitation to this study involves the use of a select criterion sample (Creswell, 2017). Co-researchers for this study were selected because they all participated in The Abba Project fathering intervention during their daughter's adolescence. While this participation enabled the co-researchers to speak meaningfully to the topic of investigation, the proactive approach of these fathers may limit the generalizability of their perspectives to broader

populations of fathers. This limitation was recognized at the outset of this study and was deemed to be acceptable due to the scarcity of research on fathers' participation in an intervention of this kind. In addition to being highly invested, the co-researchers were also a homogenous group: They all had some college or advanced professional training, identified as Christian, were between the ages of 43 and 60, and all but one identified as Caucasian. Presenting the research questions to a larger and more diverse group of fathers may help to refine and expand the applicability of the present findings.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This heuristic study of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship and fathers' participation in an intervention designed to promote the relationship provided significant insight into the experiences of help-seeking fathers. At the same time, the study served to highlight several important areas that remain poorly understood where further study might be beneficial. While the present study granted access to the experiences of fathers who participated in The Abba Project fathering intervention, it only tells a part of the story. A follow-up study with the daughters of these fathers and with the daughters' mothers would provide a more complete picture of how all parties involved in the family system experienced the fathers' participation in the intervention.

The father-daughter relationship remains an area that is ripe for further study (Allen & Daly, 2007; Lamb, 2000; Nielsen, 2007). The broad scope of the present study was useful for illuminating many important aspects of the fathering experience, though numerous aspects of this experience would benefit from further study. This might include an examination of how men differentially experience fathering a son as compared with a daughter and how these very different experiences impact men's growth and development. Because this study concentrated

on fathers of adolescent daughters, a significant number of participants in The Abba Project were excluded from participation. Including fathers of older daughters in a future study might provide additional information about how father-daughter relationships continue to develop once daughters enter adulthood.

The present study identified the importance of fathers acquiring an enriched sense of their role and importance. A broad-based survey of fathers' perceptions of the fathering role might be useful for establishing the more general perceptions of fathers—something that might further shape the development of services and initiatives that are designed to promote their involvement. Such a study might be particularly important in gaining an understanding of the beliefs of fathers who are less proactive and less immediately invested in their fathering role.

### **Relocating the Researcher in Light of the Findings**

The impetus for this study arose from a number of different sources, but from the beginning, the topic has been an intensely personal one. As a father to three young daughters who has experience counseling adolescents with minimally involved fathers, I was enthralled by the topic on both personal and professional levels. In learning about The Abba Project fathering intervention, I was intrigued by the opportunity to better understand the experiences of fathers who were deliberate about improving relations with their daughters. My direct interaction with the co-researchers was an influential experience that has changed me as a father, as a researcher, and as a future counselor-educator.

I came into this project with a high view of fathers' importance. This flowed from my extensive review of literature related to fatherhood and my own clinical experience with adolescents whose fathers were minimally involved. I also approached the project with an eagerness to learn anything and everything that might improve my own fathering and in turn

benefit my daughters. Study participants provided unvarnished accounts of their fathering experiences—acknowledging the real challenges of painful conflict, withdrawal, and feeling torn between work and family. Many of these experiences were mirrored in my own fathering experience: As I dedicated time to work and to this research project, I worried that my daughters and son were getting less than my best. In this way, I felt that I was not only conducting this study but also living it. That experience gave me a deep appreciation for the earnestness and the dedication of the co-researchers. It also gave me a sense of hope for my own fathering and for the state of fathering more generally.

My sense of the specialness of the father-daughter bond, already well-developed, has further expanded. There remains some mystery and some magic about the encounter of “otherness” in daughters. This encounter left the participants, and me, in a state of reverent awe. The opportunity to father a daughter—though it cannot and should not be idealized—has been confirmed for me as a profound privilege. Because it is difficult to capture in prose the fuller reaches of my personal learning and my expanded view of the relationship between fathers and daughters, I will conclude this section with some poetic reflection on what I have learned about this relationship. Moustakas (1990) describes the value of synthesizing research findings and research experiences into a final creative expression. The following lines arose spontaneously from my encounter with the data just after I had completed my final interview.

### The Other and the Self

The other...and the self,  
coming into *knowing* and becoming known.  
A self rounded out and filled.  
A self aloof in the heavy gaps of  
existential isolation.

Being and becoming:  
male and female,  
parent and child.  
Father, alas, and daughter:  
being and becoming  
together.  
Learning the other is  
learning the self.

Growth in stages and passing days:  
From newborn girl in cautious grip,  
to bride alone in parting glory.  
That same aging but upholding arm  
glides down an aisle of  
certain length and finitude.

Handing over the girl to a man.  
Another cycle, another's turn,  
And on that softening arm goes  
to older age and time's reckoning.  
The caring one in need of care:  
A slip and a reverse.

How were days spent in-between?  
Mutual enrichment, or  
proliferation of the broken soul.  
The opportunity to father:  
taken or muddled through.  
From one generation to the next,  
passing strength or only fractures..

Men develop  
in relationship to their daughters:  
becoming the full people  
they were intended  
and their daughters need.

The mutuality of this relationship,  
the responsibility for it—  
squarely on him to shoulder.  
The shoulder that holds the arm  
that held and holds the girl.

God knows.  
The strength and softness  
of a father's heart.  
Open for breaking  
and receiving: The heart  
that in vulnerability and givenness  
can be filled to overflowing.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an opportunity to discuss the findings by placing them in the context of existing research. Interpretation of this study's findings led to the identification of numerous areas for practical application. Methods for dissemination of these findings were presented along with a list of specific groups who might benefit from them. An articulation of specific action tips accompanied discussion of the implications of the findings for social change. This was followed by a consideration of limitations to the study and recommendations for further study. Finally, the chapter concluded by revisiting my experience as the researcher and presenting a creative synthesis that portrayed this experience.

### **Final Summary**

The first chapter of this study provided background on the topic of father/adolescent-daughter relations and highlighted the need for further study of interventions that are designed to promote this relationship. The conceptual ethic of generative fathering (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998) was presented as a useful framework for understanding and promoting father involvement. I detailed my personal interest in the topic and explained the rationale behind the selection of a qualitative heuristic (Moustakas, 1990) research approach. Specific research questions were articulated, and both assumptions and limitations of the research approach were acknowledged.

Chapter Two presented a review of relevant literature that focused on the following areas: the context of fathering, female adolescent development, the importance of the father/adolescent-daughter relationship, interventions that target this relationship, the Abba fathering groups, and the qualitative heuristic research approach. This review served to ground the present study in the existing literature while at the same time identifying important gaps in the literature that this study would address.

The third chapter provided a description of the research design, detailing processes for participant selection and outlining procedures for data collection and analysis. Along with ethical considerations and IRB involvement, issues related to validity and trustworthiness were addressed. The fourth chapter provided demographic information on the 11 co-researchers and summarized findings that were associated with each of the six research questions. Primary themes and subthemes were identified and supported by inclusion of quotes and narratives from the study participants. Finally, Chapter Five provided an opportunity for discussion of the findings and consideration of their implications for a number of specific populations. Overall, this research project has been successful in explicating the experiences of help-seeking fathers of adolescent daughters. The information presented by the co-researchers gives insight into the richness of the father-daughter relationship. It also holds potential for shaping and directing fathering services toward more affirming, inclusive, and therefore successful practices.

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**APPENDIX A: Interview Guide**

1. Tell me a bit about your experience of fathering a daughter.
2. What personal meaning or significance do you associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter?
  - a. How do you see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?
  - b. How would you say that you have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?
3. How would you describe your experience of participating in The Abba Project fathering intervention?
  - a. How would you describe your feelings about participating in a family focused intervention?
    - i. What barriers, if any did you encounter in considering participation?
    - ii. How did you overcome these barriers?
4. How do you describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in your relationships with your adolescent or young adult daughter(s) during and after participation in The Abba Project?
5. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would you offer to other fathers of adolescent or young adult daughters?

**APPENDIX B: Letter of Invitation**

November 13, 2016

Title of Study: Support with Fathering an Adolescent Daughter: A Heuristic Investigation of Men's Experiences with a Targeted Fathering Intervention.

Principle Researcher: Jeffrey D. Boatner; Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Dissertation Supervisor/Chair: Lisa S. Sosin, Ph.D., Director Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision Program, Liberty University.

I, Jeffrey Boatner, Ph.D. candidate, from the Counselor Education and Supervision Program, Liberty University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled *Support with Fathering an Adolescent Daughter: A Heuristic Investigation of Men's Experiences with a Targeted Fathering Intervention*

The purpose of this research is to explore your experience with participating in The Abba Project fathering intervention. This qualitative study will explore your experience in deciding for, participating in, and reflecting on involvement with The Abba Project. The primary research questions framing this study are: What drives men to participate in targeted fathering services and what aspects of those services do they find most helpful and appealing?

Each individual participant who chooses to participate in this study will be asked to complete a 20 minute online-demographic survey and participate in a 60-minute recorded video-conference interview. You will also be asked to engage in one week of personal journaling about your thoughts and feelings related to participation in The Abba Project. In order to ensure that your experiences have been accurately and comprehensively understood, you will also be asked to review a summary write-up of your personal experience and a composite write-up of the experiences of all participants once the data has been collected and initially reviewed.

This study will provide rich descriptions of the experiences of fathers who have intentionally sought out and participated in a supportive intervention designed to promote the father-adolescent/young adult daughter relationship. Learning about these experiences will enable family service workers to develop and refine services so that they better fit with men's expressed needs and preferences. Furthermore, your participation will facilitate an understanding

of the dynamics involved in the father-daughter relationship during the transitional stage of adolescence and young adulthood. The risks involved in this study are minimal, but come primarily from your intentional reflection on experiences with a relationship that may be, or have been, a source of strain and frustration.

If you choose to participate in this research, please respond to [jdboatner@liberty.edu](mailto:jdboatner@liberty.edu) with the word “Father” in the subject line. Within the message box of the email, please include your full name and email. If you choose not to participate, please respond with the word “No, thank you” in the subject line. Upon your affirmative response, you will be emailed an Informed Consent Form, which can be signed and returned to me by email or postal service. If you have any questions, please feel free to include them in the message box of your email. Alternately, you may contact me to schedule a time to talk through any questions that you may have. Thank you.

Jeffrey D. Boatner

Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

(434) 592-4033

[jdboatner@liberty.edu](mailto:jdboatner@liberty.edu)

**APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form**

Study name: Support with Fathering an Adolescent Daughter: A Heuristic Investigation of Men's Experiences with a Targeted Fathering Intervention

Researcher: Jeffrey D Boatner, Ph.D. Candidate, Counselor Education and Supervision  
Program, Liberty University.  
(434) 592-4033  
jdboatner@liberty.edu

You are invited to be in a research study of the experience of participating in an intervention designed to promote the father-adolescent/young adult daughter relationship. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation in The Abba Project. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to explore your experience of participating in The Abba Project fathering intervention. This qualitative study will explore your experience with deciding for, participating in, and reflecting on your involvement with The Abba Project. The primary research questions framing this study are: What drives men to participate in targeted fathering services and what aspects of those services do they find most helpful and appealing?

What you will be asked to do in the research: You will be asked to complete a 20 minute online-demographic survey and participate in a 60-minute recorded video-conference interview. You will also be asked to engage in one week of personal journaling about your thoughts and feelings related to participation in The Abba Project. In order to ensure that your experiences have been accurately and comprehensively understood, you will also be asked to review a summary write-up of your personal experience and a composite write-up of the experiences of all participants once the data has been collected and initially reviewed.

Benefits and Risks of the Research: This study will provide rich descriptions of the experiences of fathers who have intentionally sought out and participated in a supportive intervention designed to promote the father-adolescent/young adult daughter relationship. Learning about these experiences will enable family service workers to develop and refine services so that they better fit with men's expressed needs and preferences. Furthermore, your participation will facilitate an understanding of the dynamics involved in the father-daughter relationship during the transitional stage of adolescence. The risks involved in this study are minimal, but come primarily from your intentional reflection on experiences with a relationship that may be, or have been, a source of strain and frustration.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision to discontinue participation, or refusal to answer particular questions, will not influence your relationship with the



researcher or Liberty University, now or in the future. In the event that you choose to withdraw from the study, email your request to the researcher listed below, along with a brief explanation. You will then be removed from the study and all associated data collected will be destroyed.

**Confidentiality:** The researcher has a primary obligation to take every precaution in keeping the collected data secure and stored in a sound location. Coding will be utilized to replace the participant's personal identification and maintain confidentiality. All written notes, verbal conversations, journals, and audio/video recordings, of which this researcher has sole access to, come under the commitment of confidentiality. All materials will be transported in a locked container and stored in the researcher's office in a locked cabinet behind a locked door, secured with passwords when appropriate. However, it is within the participant's understanding that the coded materials will be utilized within the writing of this researcher's publishable documents. Records will be retained for a minimum of five years (APA, 2010).

**Questions about the Research:** If you have questions about the research in general or your role in the study, please feel free to contact me or my Faculty Advisor.

Researcher:  
Jeffrey D. Boatner  
(434) 592-4033  
jdboatner@liberty.edu

Faculty Advisor:  
Dr. Lisa S. Sosin  
(434) 592-4042  
lssosin@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio record/video record me as part of my participation in this study.

**Consent:** I consent to participate in *Support with Fathering an Adolescent Daughter: A Heuristic Investigation of Men's Experiences with a Targeted Fathering Intervention* conducted by Jeffrey D. Boatner, Ph.D. Candidate. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Researcher)

**APPENDIX D: Demographic Survey**

A. Please select a pseudonym that you would like to use for this study?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

B. Age:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

C. What level of education have you completed?

1. 10<sup>th</sup> grade or less
2. High School or GED
3. Some college; Associates Degree
4. Bachelor's Degree
5. Master's Degree
6. Ph.D., Doctorate, MD
7. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

D. In which group do you place yourself?

1. African American/ Black
2. First Nations/ Inuit/ American Indian/ Alaskan Native
3. Caucasian
4. Hispanic/Latino
5. Asian
6. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

E. How would you describe your religious affiliation (if any)?

1. No religious affiliation
2. Christian (Protestant)
3. Christian (Catholic)
4. Christian (nondenominational)
5. Jewish
6. Muslim
7. Spiritual (non-specific)
8. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

F. What are the ages and genders of your children?

1. Age\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_
2. Age\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_
3. Age\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_
4. Age\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| 5. Age_____ | Gender_____ |
| 6. Age_____ | Gender_____ |
| 7. Age_____ | Gender_____ |
| 8. Age_____ | Gender_____ |

G. Please identify the number (above) of the daughter, or daughters for whom you sought out support from The Abba Project

1. Number\_\_\_\_\_
2. Number\_\_\_\_\_
3. Number\_\_\_\_\_

H. What is your **current** marital status?

1. Never married
2. Married
3. In a committed relationship
4. Widowed
5. Divorced
6. Separated

I. What is the **current** status of your relationship to your daughter's mother?

1. Married and living together
2. Not married but living together
3. Married and living separately
4. Divorced and living separately
5. Never married and never lived together
6. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

J. Prior to participating in The Abba Project, have you ever had involvement with any family oriented treatment services (counseling, parenting groups, etc)?

1. Yes
2. No

K. Prior to participating in The Abba Project, how would you describe your attitude toward family oriented treatment services?

1. Very open to participating in services
2. Somewhat open to participating in services
3. Unsure about participating in services
4. Somewhat reluctant to participate in services
5. Very reluctant to participate in services

L. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being very good and 1 being very poor) how would you rate your relationship to your own father?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

M. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being very good and 1 being very poor) how would you rate your relationship to your adolescent/young adult daughter **prior** to participation in The Abba Project?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

N. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being very good and 1 being very poor) how would you rate your relationship to your adolescent/young adult daughter **after** participating in The Abba Project?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

### **APPENDIX E: Journaling Prompt**

Instructions: In preparation for our interview, please spend a few minutes per day during the next week reflecting and journaling about the following topics. It may be useful to focus on a single topic, or prompt each day. You will be asked to send a copy of these journal entries to me as a supplement to the other information that you will provide. Please maintain use of your selected pseudonym throughout your journaling (for yourself and for any family members who are mentioned in your writing) so that anonymity can be maintained. Include your pseudonym on the first page of your initial journal entry. Please let me know if you have any question about this portion of your participation. You can reach me by email (jdboatner@liberty.edu) or phone (434) 592-4033.

Jeffrey D. Boatner  
Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

1. Share your reflections about your experience of fathering a daughter.
2. What personal meaning or significance do you associate with the experience of fathering an adolescent daughter?
  - a. How do you see adolescence as different from earlier stages in the relationship?
  - b. How would you say that you have changed as a result of the experience, if at all?
3. How would you describe your experience of participating in The Abba Project fathering intervention?
  - a. How would you describe your feelings about participating in a family focused intervention?
    - i. What barriers, if any, did you encounter in considering participation?
    - ii. How did you overcome these barriers?
4. How do you describe and explain the changes (or lack thereof) in your relationships with your adolescent or young adult daughter(s) during and after participation in The Abba Project?

5. After participating in a fathering intervention, what thoughts or recommendations would you offer to other fathers of adolescent or young adult daughters?